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■ **Andrei Sinyavsky: Russophobia**

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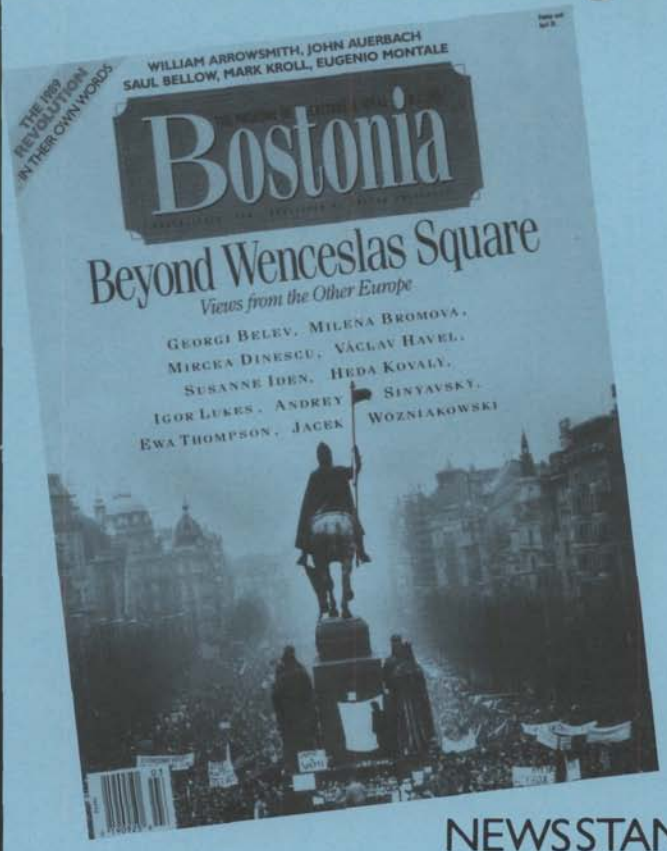
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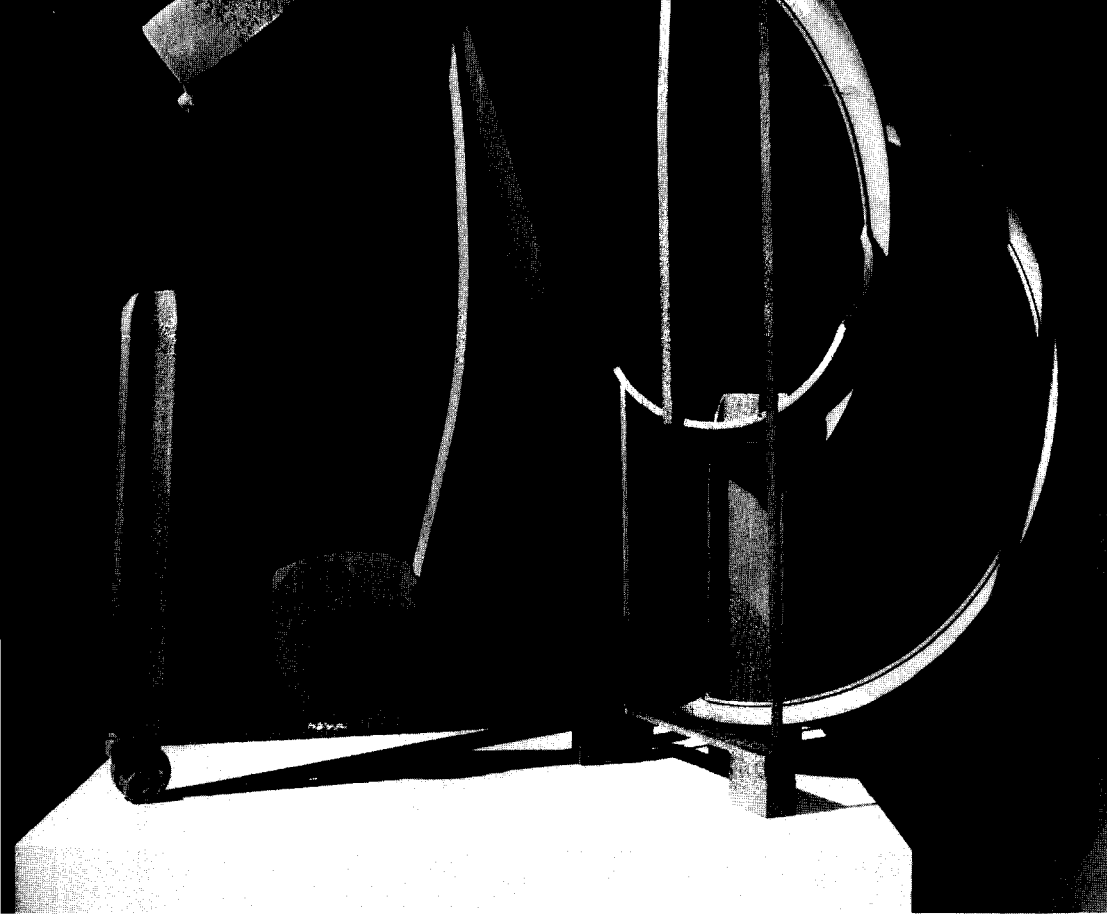

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COMMENT

Plus ça change. . . . One of the most apt examples of the old aphorism, *plus ça change* . . . is the response of some of the left to the movement for democracy and a free market in Eastern Europe. It is summed up by Samuel Bowles, a professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, who describes himself as a leftist, in a recent comment in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (April 4, 1990).

Bowles's piece is a reply to the question he says he frequently has been asked, "How are you coping with the dethroning of Marxism and the demise of communism in Eastern Europe?" His answer, which is truly astonishing, is: "I do not believe that recent events in Eastern Europe will reverse the impressive growth that has taken place since the late 1960s in the number of leftist faculty members in universities and in the outpouring of scholarship critical of American capitalism."

Bowles goes on to say that Marxism has been proven to be right about America and to deny that the countries of Eastern Europe are moving toward a free enterprise system and a Western type of democracy. He is vaguer on what he thinks these countries are headed towards and what American socialists have been advocating. Bowles claims that Eastern Europe should have as its role models the countries of Sweden, Norway, and Austria. But they are full-blown capitalist nations – with a form of the welfare state – which indeed characterizes most of the major European countries. As for what American socialists have stood for, Bowles is difficult to make out, as he goes in for some political equivocation, saying that public ownership and the end of the free market were the "means" and not the "objective" of the socialists. What does this mean?

Essentially, Bowles seems to be arguing that the revolt against socialism has not affected the thinking of American socialists. In fact, he insists it has strengthened them. Surely, this is one of the most remarkable reversals of political logic we have seen since the time of Stalinist double-think.

But it really is not very interesting to argue with these unreconstructed rationalizations. The more interesting question is how to account for them. Surely we cannot dismiss all the Marxist scholars Bowles proudly refers to as stupid. Many, like Bowles himself, are agile and accomplished academics. What then are the reasons for this intellectual freeze? It seems to me that they constitute a combination of ideological and practical motives. Ideologi-

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cally, there is the iron historical will to remain on the left at all costs – in the face of the most overwhelming repudiation of cherished leftist beliefs in those countries that had been under the sway of Marxist theory and communist practice. On the practical side, there clearly are the inertia of belief, the pressure of colleagues, and all the material considerations that attend one's status in the university. No one who has belonged to a radical group can underestimate the pressures of the group and the personal and career consequences of leaving it. To be called a traitor, a reactionary, an imperialist, a capitalist apologist – these are the least of the sanctions a former Marxist faces if he questions the tribal laws of the political clan.

W. P.

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Andrei Sinyavsky

RUSSOPHOBIA

My remarks here are about anti-Semitism in the U.S.S.R. at the present time. Ten years ago, the whole world heard about the national-religious renaissance in Russia. At about the same time, some skeptical judgements and views on this topic appeared in the journal *Syntaxis*. My own skepticism about this renaissance was that it could in some indirect fashion lead to a new Russian fascism. The juxtaposition of orthodoxy and fascism that I, cynic that I am, perceived has itself provoked considerable dissatisfaction among Russian emigrés.

Soon after the emergence of this new nationalism, articles appeared on the subject that were at first positively received by various parties and factions, as well as by myself and the West. The articles expressed views about the importance of "the preservation of architectural monuments," a concern with "environmentalism," "the restoration of the people's historical memory," and so on. Yet there was something disquieting in the accents, stresses, and intonations with which these views were put forth. The same words can, in principle, be interpreted in different ways.

For example, regarding the idea of restoring the Temple of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, one could talk only about the desirability of the restoration itself, or one could more precisely talk about who destroyed the Temple in the first place – the bolsheviks. Further, one could assert that this barbarism was committed by Kaganovich, the son of Moses, Lazar; that the temple was actually blown up upon his personal instruction. One could go on to emphasize that the Jews in general did not respect Russian monuments and Russian culture. This kind of thinking has led to the creation of the patriarchal organization, *Pamyat* (Memory), with its anti-Semitic tendencies, and to the appearance of black-shirted youth groups in Russia.

If one discusses these phenomena with liberals from the Soviet Union who are visiting here, some of whom are very intelligent and decent, they respond that it is all nonsense and that it will pass. They say that *Pamyat*, for example, does not play any significant role in shaping contemporary Russian consciousness. They reassure one that the thinking of the individuals responsible for these phenomena is at such a low level and in such bad taste that

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Editor's Note: These remarks were first presented at the Kennan Institute, Washington, D. C., on January 9, 1990.

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one should not pay them any attention.

Yet their attitude makes me recall something that took place a long time ago. In the early thirties, when Nazi speakers gathered together and discussed these same national-religious themes, in the same way and at the same level of discourse, highbrow intellectuals in various countries and universities also said that one should not pay attention to such idiots. The attitude of the intellectuals stayed the same up until the catastrophe that changed the physical and spiritual map of Europe.

Within the last year, there have been more and more alarming voices heard from Russia. For example, a correspondent for the journal *Literatúrnaya Gazéta* reported in it a telephone conversation he had with an elderly Jewish woman who more and more fears living in her own country. She told the correspondent that her grandparents and aunt had been buried alive in Kiev in 1945, but that since then she had not experienced anti-Semitism – until recently. The woman was terrified by the meetings of *Pamyat*, by the anti-Semitic articles frequently appearing. She was terrified to go out into the street, for fear of being harassed by her neighbors. The correspondent asked her why she did not go to the police to report such harassment and he offered to help her; she replied that no, it would just get worse.

Just before I arrived in America, I received a letter from a young journalist in Leningrad, an expert philologist who knows thirteen languages. He informed me that he has decided to emigrate. He explained that first of all, from a creative point of view, he saw no way for himself to fit into the system, although he had tried. He went on to say that the real problem was his Jewishness. Although he had been christened, he was terrified of what he was seeing and hearing and reading.

Strange things are happening in Russia. We have *glasnost*, and it is easier to breathe. The state indeed seems to be giving up on military expansion and pretensions of global power. But the desire to emigrate seems to be on the increase. Of course, I can judge only by those people in my circle of friends, intellectuals and academics who have asked me for help and advice. When someone who is close to sixty years old is willing to depart and start a new life in the West, something serious is going on. In another case, a man who has been published and continues to be published in Russia, who continues to write books there, repeats to me how terrified he is. *Pamyat* cannot simply be dismissed.

Last year, an event of extraordinary significance, I think, took place. Igor Shafarevich published a fundamental piece of work, a theoretical foundation of fascism, that was serialized in the Soviet Union in the journal *Nash Sovremennik* (*Our Contemporary*), titled, "Russophobia." Unfortunately, it has not yet been translated into other languages. It was apparently in-

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tended for an internal, Russian audience. In addition to *Nash Sovremennik*, Shafarevich is supported by the journal *Molodaya Gvuardiya* (*Young Guard*) and in the West by the Munich journal *Veche*, which actually first published Shafarevich's piece.

Shafarevich is not an idiot; he is a world-renowned mathematician, a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences, and an honorary professor at several foreign universities and academies. But his book, perhaps unconsciously, fully coincides with theories of German Nazism from Hitler to Rosenberg. It is a very level-headed work, written in high academic style. Its basic idea is that a small group of people, by whom he means the Jews, are Russophobes, conducting an internal struggle against the people whom they are in the midst of, the Russians.

I will give you a short quotation from Shafarevich's book: "Russophobic literature is under the strong influence of Jewish nationalist sentiments." Among the supposed Russophobes are the writers Gálich, Vitsotsky, Karecharvin, Andrei Amálrik, Grossman, Tarkovsky, Ilf and Petrov, Bialik, and Babel. In a similar way, the works of Heinrich Heine were reviled in Nazi Germany as being anti-German and banned.

Those sharing Shafarevich's thinking also explain by the use of this conspiracy theory the influence of Freud, Schoenberg, Picasso, Kafka, and the poet Brodsky. (Picasso is included on the list because according to the Hitlerite conception, his mother was Jewish.) To summarize Shafarevich's thinking, the aim of this small group is the final destruction of the religious and national foundations of life, the opportunity to manipulate decisively the fate of the Russian people, resulting in a new and final catastrophe, after which nothing of the Russian people will remain.

Shafarevich characterizes the mentality of the Jewish people as being completely alienated from and hostile to Russia's spiritual principles. It supposedly involves not just the rejection of all political rights but the desire to influence the life of the country. What is meant is that the activities of Jews throughout history are now culminating in a striving to master the whole world.

What do the Soviet writers who support Shafarevich have to say? The writer Lichutin gave an interview to the journal *Moskovsky Literátor*. Lichutin is now being put forward as the next editor-in-chief of the journal *Oktyabr*. Recently the Plenum of the Russian Writers Society removed the former editor because he supposedly published Russophobic pieces. These pieces were not Russophobic but anti-Semitic. It is quite clear from the context of these pieces that they refer to the Jews who have come to the Soviet Union to accomplish their striving for world mastery. The date for this accomplishment has already been designated, the year 2,000. This date does

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exist in ancient Jewish dogma as some kind of mystical, victorious arrival – the year that the temple in Jerusalem will be restored. Yet the anti-Semitic writings imply that this date refers to the necessity of the Jewish conquest of the world, that either we are going to get them or they are going to get us.

The journal *Veche* published a comment, an open letter to Shafarevich, written by the esteemed Igor Rostislavich, saying that Shafarevich's ideas were the kernels that would bear fruit a hundredfold, that his words would be watered and grow as plants and multiply. One can imagine the results of this propagation.

There are many other vulgar, simplistic responses to Shafarevich that I could cite, such as those from *Young Guard* and *Our Contemporary*. For example, Sakharov was referred to as an exemplar of hatred for his fatherland, an incarnation of Russophobia. There are also metaphorical references to Stalin's supposed struggle with the supposed enemies of the people, the trials of the 1930s, according to which Stalin, as the legendary Hercules, was forced to clean out the Aegean Stables, one of his twelve tasks. Soviet democrats have been accused of calling for American intervention. Then the only hope for the Russians would be to be defended by the soldiers who fought in Afghanistan, a euphemism for the belief that only a general could then save Russia.

It is true that Shafarevich has been criticized by liberals and democrats in the Soviet Union, but their criticism is weak and not well-founded. Shafarevich, on the other hand, has been given many opportunities to speak out. He was even granted expression in the very liberal newspaper, *Moskovskie Novosty* (*The Moscow News*), although he is of course not a liberal but an extreme conservative. The liberals are for some reason trying to be friendly to Shafarevich, to find a common language. The question of why there is such trepidation and timidity in response to him naturally arises.

I think that the problem is not with Shafarevich's stupid and frivolous ideas but with those who stand behind him and with the ground onto which his ideas are falling. It is embittering to have to acknowledge that the great authority of Solzhenitzyn stands behind Shafarevich. Lest there be any misunderstanding, let me immediately characterize my position with regard to Solzhenitzyn. I value highly his early works, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and *The Gulag Archipelago*. Yet Solzhenitzyn has not stood still, like some sort of icon. During the period of his emigration, his views have gone through a great evolution, and I cannot accept without question the Solzhenitzyn of *The Red Wheel* and other writings of his since his earlier works.

Solzhenitzyn and Shafarevich have been close friends for many years, comrades-in-arms with shared viewpoints. For example, they published a

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collection of articles in 1974 with the English title, *Under the Rubble*, when Solzhenitzyn had just emigrated to the West. The same collection appeared at the same time in Russia in a *samiszdat* edition. Later on, in his work *The Calf*, Solzhenitzyn characterized Shafarevich as the greatest Russian thinker, one who has an inner link to Russian history. Although, to be sure, Sharafevich is a great mathematician, it is a bit difficult to accept him as a great historian, since in that capacity he appears pretty helpless. In his book, he presents Jews as subordinating themselves to the requirements of the Old Testament, explaining their hatred for all other peoples. He cites biblical prophets, as if the Jews had been standing still in the same place since those times.

The very term *Russophobia* was introduced by Solzhenitzyn himself; in a 1983 press conference, he said that the leading views of Western public opinion have been influenced over decades in the direction of anti-Russian sentiments. Solzhenitzyn's views appeared in his work *Our Pluralists*, not yet published in English but available in France. In this work, he characterizes support of pluralism as Russophobic. He seems to be trying to define pluralists as those who have gone in the direction of hatred toward Russian culture. He actually claims that many pluralists want to exterminate physically the Russian people. He plays upon the fact of Western pluralism to assert that pluralists in Russia are pushing the West to repeat Hitler's enterprise, not only against Communism but against the Russian people. Solzhenitzyn does not go as far as Shafarevich in linking all Russian disasters with the Jews, but it might be said that he prepared the ground for the growth of Shararevich's views.

In Solzhenitzyn's work *Lenin in Zurich*, much of which is incorporated in *The Red Wheel* and his conception of the Russian Revolution, his very good portrait of Lenin owes much to Valentinov's marvelous books, *Encounters with Lenin* and *Unknown Lenin*. Yet his portrait of Lenin differs from Valentinov's in that Solzhenitzyn presents Lenin as a Russophobe, who created a revolution because he hated and scorned Russia. I should say that I am not an admirer of Lenin, but I cannot agree with the treatment of Lenin as a Russophobe. Solzhenitzyn cites but does not elaborate on the fact that Lenin was only one-quarter Russian; he implicitly recalls the familiar claim that Lenin was also one-quarter Kalmyk, one-quarter either German or Swedish, and one-quarter Jewish. (One scholar has intelligently noted that many Russian czars had even less Russian blood than Lenin, due to various mixed marriages with foreigners, and yet they didn't like Russia any less; in fact, they adored it.) This quarter measure of Jewish blood is not just a plot device for Solzhenitzyn's book. It allows him to link Lenin with world Jewry. In the book's plot, the devil shows up as Israel, pouring German money into the

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Russian Revolution and pouring Jewish blood into Lenin. I would like to point out that nowhere else in real literature, discounting the shrill, vulgar sort, does one find the equivalent of the anti-Semitic sentiment expressed in *Lenin in Zurich*. The notion of Lenin's quarter of Jewish blood is a metaphor in the book for the worldwide influence of Jews, the pervasive smell of their blood pursuing us from Auschwitz, where six million of them were destroyed.

In the West, we have Solzhenitzyn, and in the East, Shafarevich, conducting an "inquiry" into the supposed universal Russophobia on the part of the Jews. In fact, there is no Russophobia on the part of the Jews. To be sure, there are examples of Russophobia on the part of minorities who have been subordinated by the Russians, such as the Poles or the Balts, but certainly not on a worldwide scale. For half a century, no Jew has held a leading position in the Soviet government. Yet for fifty years, some kind of Russophobic Satan has supposedly prevented things from getting better. In fact, perhaps the Jews might have been able to change things for the better.

In my view, nationalism itself is not a serious danger today. It can be a positive, flourishing thing, until it brings out from under itself a poisonous ferment – the seeking of an enemy. Something similar has already taken place in the Soviet Union, with the conceptualization of the class enemy. The struggle against the class enemy continued and was conducted even after there were no classes left.

Today, Russian nationalists who call themselves patriots are characterized by a new mania, the mania of Russophobia. The idea of the class enemy has been metamorphosized into the idea of the Russophobe, the bourgeois encirclement and penetration of the Soviet Union. It is a modification of Stalinist imagery, of Brezhnev's terminology, of ideological myth. It repels me not just by its vulgarity but because it is dangerous. After all, if there is an association of both foreign and internal Russophobes who are striving to destroy the soul, the body, the memory of the Russian people themselves, then one must strike back at them.

When a multinational empire is at the brink of dissolution, as I think the Soviet Union today is, various people begin to put forth nationalistic ideas. This, after all, is the way many great empires have ended. The rise of a powerful and militant Russian nationalism is an attempt to protect and support the Soviet empire. The Soviet Union today reminds me of a huge warehouse filled with combustible materials ready to explode. In this combustible atmosphere the Russian nationalists are playing with matches, one of the most dangerous of which is called Russophobia.

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Susan Dunn

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE LANGUAGE OF TERROR

In 1858, eight years after the publication of his book, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, Alexis de Tocqueville recognized the centrality and the mystery of a question he had not even raised in that luminous and seminal work, the question of the virus of the Terror:

> There is in this disease of the French Revolution something very strange that I can sense, though I cannot describe it properly or analyze its causes. It is a *virus* of a new and unknown kind. There have been violent Revolutions in the world before; but the immoderate, violent, radical, desperate, bold, almost crazed and yet powerful and effective character of these Revolutionaries has no precedents. What produced it? What made it so effective? What perpetuates it? I am exhausting my mind trying to conceive a clear notion of this object and seeking a way to depict it properly.

Tocqueville died the following year, and we shall never know what insights into political violence and revolutionary dictatorship he may have had. In *The Old Regime*, violence never occupied the center stage; it was a given, beneath contempt. A lethal dose of it was all that the Revolution had added of its own to the progressive trends already set in motion by a modern, enlightened, energetic, and conscientious monarchy.

For two centuries, historians have grappled with the problem of the Terror, hypothesizing either two quasi-independent Revolutions, idealistic and humanitarian 1789 and merciless and self-destructive 1793, or only one – an essentially violent phenomenon, whether the violence was spontaneous and popular as in 1789 or institutionalized as in 1793. In one way or another, 1793 had to be accounted for, as a product of or an aberration from 1789. A few profoundly conservative historians, such as the ultra-reactionary Joseph de Maistre, considered the Terror the essence of a satanic Revolution. Others, liberals like Madame de Staël and Benjamin Constant, who were among the first historians of the Revolution, regretted the Terror as an unfortunate but not crucial accident of history. Still others, such as Mignet, made excuses for the Terror by claiming that it was the result of political necessity, a forced reaction to desperate circumstances such as the

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Counterrevolution. According to this view, the Revolution's failure to establish stable republican institutions could be blamed on counterrevolutionary opposition and not on the Terror. In the mid-nineteenth century, Louis Blanc added a new dimension. His originality, as François Furet remarked, was in discerning in the Jacobin dictatorship the annunciation of socialism – a strong protectionist state that could prevail over individualism and protect workers from capitalist exploitation.

According to this implausible yet influential interpretation, the Terror was the renaissance of state power in service of the disadvantaged. The opposing theory was offered by the liberal republican historian, Edgar Quinet, for whom the Terror was the fatal renaissance of the absolutist tradition, binding the Revolution to the past instead of opening the way to freedom and the future. By assimilating the Terror and the monarchy, Quinet not only gave a bad name to the Old Regime but failed to distinguish between Jacobin lawlessness and Bourbon legitimacy. In Jacobin ideology, Quinet could find neither a denunciation of despotism nor any justification of the Terror – no civilizing purpose, no meaning, no goal other than hatred and violence. It was simply the cynical recourse to the traditional methods of force and power. The negation of 1789 was 1793, a doomed return to the past.

It was Jules Michelet, probably the greatest nineteenth-century historian of the Revolution, who, more than anyone else, established the narrative elements of the history of the Revolution. His colorful, profound, empathic "resurrection" of the past identified characters, fathomed souls, developed plots, created myths, and articulated for his century the heroic legacy of the Revolution. His vision of a humanitarian and idealistic Revolution became the foundation of nineteenth-century republican ideology. It tormented Michelet to have to deal with the Terror, which he described as a desert where pity was mute and only horror spoke. But his commitment to narrative obliged him to describe it fully and meditate upon its significance. It was not possible to treat the Terror as in any way inconsequential, and yet he was loath to associate his cherished Revolution with 1793. His strategy was therefore to portray Jacobinism as a phenomenon produced by a minority with no popular support and which owed its success to the manipulation of an ideological orthodoxy. Unlike the Girondins who publicized their internal differences, the Jacobins emphasized unity, bending all positions and circumstances to fit their ideological canon. The Terror borrowed nothing from the Old Regime nor did it have roots in the humanitarian idealism of 1789: it belonged solely to the Jacobins.

Since Michelet, the Marxist school (Jaurès, Lefebvre, Soboul) has fused Mignet's idea of the Terror as an understandable and necessary reaction to

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compelling circumstances and Blanc's praise of a strong protectionist state. Marxists defend the Terror as a dictatorship that succeeded in cleansing the nation of socially nonassimilable elements, restoring authority to the government, developing a sense of national solidarity, and controlling the economy.

Historians of the political right have always been able to criticize the Revolution while remaining within the parameters of counterrevolutionary thought. It has been a far greater challenge for pro-republican historians like Michelet and Marxist historians to voice doubts about the Revolution, for they risked calling into question the legacy and myth of the Revolution as well as the republican system of values and beliefs. In our own century, political terror emanating from the left of the political spectrum has led modern historians to abandon such inhibitions and reevaluate and reinterpret the Terror, to fathom the relationship between revolutionary, humanitarian ideology and political persecution. Criticism of the French antecedents of totalitarianism and political violence is no longer the sole province of the right.

Simon Schama's marvelous and monumental work, *Citizens*,* deliberately places the Terror at the center of the Revolution – it is its motor, its energy, its driving force. His is a complex and original vision of a Terror emanating not only from institutions such as the Comité des Rapports and the Comité des Recherches, that were already set up by the end of July 1789 and would come to represent the centralized and arbitrary powers of a revolutionary police state, but, in a more profound sense, from the very *language* of revolution. By examining the rhetoric of violence – idealistic, histrionic, enraged, and paranoid, Schama is able to portray the Terror, not as a mistake, an aberration, a policy compelled by circumstances, or the acting out of Jacobin ideology, but instead as the essence of the Revolution itself.

During the first months of the Revolution, the time of the Estates General, the two dominant and opposing trends in revolutionary thought were already apparent: rationalists, like Talleyrand and Condorcet, were exponents of modernity, constitutional monarchy, a liberal economic and legal order. Their language was reasonable and their tempers were cool. On the other hand, there were those who were guided neither by rationality nor by modernity but by passion, virtue, and patriotism. Their language, tuned to a taut pitch of elation and anger, was visceral rather than cerebral. From the beginning, this kind of revolutionary rhetoric divided the nation into patriots and traitors, citizens and aristocrats, categories which allowed for no human shades of gray. The new community of citizens would be tender to its chil-

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**Citizens, A Chronicle of the French Revolution*. By Simon Schama. Alfred A. Knopf. $29.95.

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dren, but punitive and pitiless to its foes. For Schama, "the notion that, between 1789 and 1791, France basked in some sort of liberal pleasure garden before the erection of the guillotine is a complete fantasy." The language and politics of paranoia that would eventually engulf and drown the entire Revolution can be traced to its first months.

During the summer of 1789, moderates were alarmed not just by spontaneous popular retribution and murderously festive crowd actions but by the verbal and journalistic violence that seemed to encourage such demonstrations. The protection of free speech, publication, and assembly enshrined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man brought forth a political culture whose vituperation and boundless disrespect reached an unprecedentedly broad audience. Schama stresses that this necessarily unsatisfied rhetoric, suffused with the chronic obsession with exploitation, conspiracy, and public punishment, mobilized angry and powerful crowds, decisively affecting the course of events and ultimately making revolutionary government unworkable.

Political compromise and sage deliberations about practical government, in the manner of the American Constitutional Convention, never took place in revolutionary France. "Croaking toad," shouted the deputy Guadet in one heated exchange. "Vile bird," yelled back Marat. Another deputy had demanded that the tribune be disinfected after every speech by Marat, who then returned the compliment by characterizing his enemies as charlatans, hypocrites, maniacs, and stool pigeons. Reasoned debate, self-restraint, civility, and discipline were, in France, entirely beside the point.

Power resided in words, in oratory skill, verbal abuse and intimidation. Public utterance and the ability to sway audiences made the difference between life and death, triumph and disaster. Conversely, failure to be heard could be a death sentence. When Robespierre was shouted down and his arrest called for, the standard devices of his rhetoric were ridiculed. He was struck down by the one weapon against which he was helpless: laughter. Public diction was public power. Schama perceives no real difference between verbal violence and the real thing, between screaming for blood and its copious shedding. The Vendée war and the September massacres, were products of the Manichean language that everywhere identified monsters and incarnations of evil. The drownings and mass exterminations of the Terror were the logical outcome of an ideology that verbally dehumanized its adversaries.

At the end of *Citizens*, Schama poses the fundamental question of why the French Revolution was powered by brutality, why violence was its motor. He offers the hypothesis that, in a sense, the revolutionary elite were "rash geologists, gouging open great holes in the crust of polite discourse and

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then feeding the angry matter through the pipes of their rhetoric out into the open." His emphasis on discourse and rhetoric leads him to wonder if it "was perhaps Romanticism, with its addiction to the Absolute and the Ideal . . . its concept of political energy as . . . electrical; its obsession with the heart, its preference for passion over reason . . . that supplied a crucial ingredient in the mentality of the revolutionary elite: its association of liberty with wildness." Schama strangely locates French Romanticism in the eighteenth rather than the early nineteenth century, attempting to associate the revolutionary mentality with themes and delusions. The trouble is that, although Rousseau is considered a pre-Romantic, the first two generations of writers in France – Chateaubriand, Constant, Lamartine, Vigny, Balzac, Hugo – not only wrote years after the Revolution but were liberals or pro-royalists, for the most part antipathetic toward the Revolution. One would be hard put to discern an attraction for "liberty" and "wildness" in their nostalgia for the Old Regime. But despite this incorrect view of French Romanticism which surfaces throughout the book, Schama's intention is nevertheless important and valid. His aim is to depict the Revolution as a phenomenon created, not by impersonal trends or forces in history, but by individuals who succeeded in creating political power through personality, style, and rhetoric as much as through action and violence. It is this vision of history that has led him to subtitle *Citizens* a "chronicle" and to narrate it, in many engaging ways, like a novel, in terms of characters self-consciously acting on the stage of history.

Schama's refreshing goal is to return the Revolution to human beings, extricating it from the analytical concepts and ideological paradigms that appear to explain the Revolution while only illuminating or obscuring a single aspect of it to the exclusion of all others. History, for Schama, is not a preordained event but a thing of contingencies, unforeseen consequences, and especially individual agencies. This magnificently illustrated and exuberant book is the story of the Revolution: its narrative form is not an anachronism but is essential to the author's concept of the Revolution as a haphazard and chaotic event, the product of arbitrary decisions and idiosyncratic individuals. The Annales School for one loathes narrative history: a genre that concentrates on human agents who have control over their lives is anathema to those who believe that history is determined by impersonal forces, such as long-term trends in demography, economics, and ethnology. But in Schama's text, history consists in dramatic accidents and the actions of exceptional human beings. Only the narrative form that allows for the complicated twists and turns of action and reaction can make the whole tableau intelligible. Following the lead of the theorist of history David Carr, Schama agrees that the historian's use of narrative does not necessarily *impose* a literary structure on the flow of events, but rather can reveal a structure already immanent in the un-

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folding of human activity. Like his teacher Richard Cobb, Schama regards the Revolution not as a march of abstractions and ideologies, but as a human event of complicated and often tragic outcomes.

And, as Schama himself notes, narrative form corresponds perfectly to his view of the historical figures themselves, self-conscious heroes and actors who fully realized that they were shaping their destiny and the destiny of France. These were public men aware of being on the stage of world history, men who had an overdeveloped sense of past, present, and posterity, who looked to Cato, Cicero, and Junius Brutus for models. An appreciative sense of the theatricality of revolutionary politics suffuses Schama's vision of the Revolution. Even before July 1789, theater had moved from its customary space onto the street where it imposed its serious drama on the world of mere *divertissement*. Audiences were now required to give the Revolution their full attention. Although the National Assembly was, in principle, committed to giving France new institutions of government and representation, it functioned as political theater: the place where oratory and gesture would dramatize the principles of the Revolution. The Revolution's leaders cultivated rhetorical devices, consciously and effectively using them to wield power. Robespierre rehearsed a distinctive style of righteous indignation always accompanied by an account of his personal life, an "oratory of the ego" that corresponded brilliantly to the confessional manner invented by Rousseau. Saint-Just cast himself in the role of the Roman stoic. Danton employed his great, deep voice to testify to resources of virile power that republican culture associated with virtue. Marat, in addition to being pathologically profane, attended to his costume, affecting ostentatious simplicity: bare-throated, unkempt black hair, an old ermine scarf thrown over his shoulders. Even his assassin, Charlotte Corday, a descendant of Corneille, seems to have self-consciously cast herself in the tragic role of patriotic martyr. In a final gesture of self-dramatization, she asked to have her portrait painted before her execution. From Mirabeau to Marat, Schama views the cast of revolutionary characters as theatrical beings who felt themselves framed within a brilliantly lit Historical Moment.

In his great novel, *Ninety-Three*, Victor Hugo conceptualized the Revolution not as the product of the activity of free agents, something one might expect from a novelist, but rather as irresistible process and the will of God: "Revolution is an action of the Unknown. Events spend, men pay. Events dictate, men sign. July 14th is signed Camille Desmoulins, August 10th is signed Danton, September 2nd is signed Marat, January 21st is signed Robespierre; but Desmoulins, Danton, Marat, and Robespierre are mere clerks. The immense and awful author of these great pages has a name, God; and a mask, Fate." But Schama's revolutionary actors, unlike

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Hugo's, wrote their own script – they controlled the course and outcome of the Revolution, and the crucial decisions they made were personal and arbitrary. For example, one of the most important decisions affecting the origin of the Revolution was Louis XVI's willingness to support the Revolution in America. This policy had profound economic and social consequences in France, and yet it was anything but preordained. Turgot had argued bitterly against intervention in America, predicting that overwhelming costs would force the postponement of necessary reforms. But the case was won by the powerful Foreign Minister Vergennes, whose foremost goal was the embarrassment of the British crown in America. Ultimately, the consequences of French involvement in the American Revolution were subversive and irreversible.

Schama attributes unusual importance to the flirtation with armed freedom of a section of the aristocracy that was powerful and influential. And, of course, the American affair was also the source of more debt for a regime already plagued by grave financial problems. In a single year, 1781 – the year of Yorktown – 225 million *livres* were spent on America, five times the amount customarily allotted for the peacetime navy. Here too, Schama views the debt not as an immutable problem inherent in the structure of the institutions but rather as the result of particular decisions made freely by individuals. Taking issue with Tocqueville, for whom French institutions were themselves intrinsically incapable of solving the regime's fiscal problems, Schama believes that there were a number of possible approaches in coping with French finances and that the trouble lay in the political and psychological difficulties in sustaining policy decisions rather than in the regime's institutional and operational structure. He takes the approach that, in August 1788, it was Brienne's government, not France, that was bankrupt, as the speed with which his successor, Necker, raised loans of all kinds amply bore out. Ultimately, the cause of the downfall of the monarchy was the politicization of the money crisis that dictated the calling of the Estates General. However, this very calling of the Estates General also hinged on personal decisions. In describing the last hours of Malesherbes, the King's Minister and, in 1793, his defense lawyer, Schama goes so far as to leave history's text to invent his own: "Of all the cruelties visited on the old man, the most painful was the likely reflection that by not heeding his younger daughter's advice to emigrate he had somehow . . . destroyed his family. And did he ponder whether, if Louis had listened to his counsel and had abandoned the Estates General altogether in favor of an entirely new constitution that might have avoided the polarization of the orders, the worst calamities of the Revolution might have been averted?" "Likely reflection"; ". . . did he ponder?"; ". . . if Louis had listened"; ". . . might have been" – this is Schama as novelist-historian,

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insisting upon his actors' free will and fallibility, humanizing history's march and persuading his readers that in history, as in the novel, alternative texts are possible.

This narrative of the Revolution permits Schama not only to emphasize the central role of agents acting freely, self-consciously, and arbitrarily, but also to create an underlying impression of continuity in time. Like Tocqueville, he sees the political aspirations of the Revolution not as the sign of a new beginning but rather as the continuation of policies and reforms initiated by the Old Regime. The Revolution merely accelerated the process, crystallizing trends that were begun under a dynamic and energetic Old Regime. From the king downward, the elite under the Old Regime was less obsessed with tradition than with novelty and less preoccupied with feudalism than with science. Well-disposed to the Old Regime, Schama considers it a conscientious government eager to busy itself with the public good.

It follows that the consequences of the Revolution from 1789 to the Terror were, for the most part, socially conservative. The effects of much of the legislation of this period played directly to the interests of groups who had done very well at the end of the Old Regime and were now given further opportunities to do even better. With the momentous exception of the expropriation of the Church, between 1789 and 1792 the Revolution produced no significant transfer of social power; it signified neither a new beginning nor a radical transformation of society. In fact, one of Schama's most interesting – although not sufficiently developed – hypotheses affirms that the Revolution was a source of antiprogressive as well as progressive tendencies. Certain key elements in the Revolution had attempted to arrest rather than hasten the process of modernization begun under the Old Regime. Though the Jacobins were great respecters of property, they feared and opposed commercial capitalism. Their incessant rhetoric against "rich egoists" and the incrimination of commercial and financial elites meant that mercantile and industrial enterprise was itself attacked. Not surprising, then, that the textile towns and great ports were the major casualties of the Revolution.

Much of revolutionary energy was fueled by gloom and foreboding over modernization and capitalism. The hatred of the Old Regime was paradoxically directed not against what it preserved, but what it had destroyed. For people such as the independent artisans ruined by machines, the onrush of a modernizing monarchy had aggravated, not alleviated, their condition. Many of the Convention decrees, such as the one voted to regulate the grain trade, went straight back to Old Regime paternalism, a classic instance of the French Revolution's yearning for security over freedom, for the values of paternalism over those of individualism. Much of the radicals' anger had been a reaction against the unpredictable and impersonal operation of the

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market. Far from wanting the state to dismantle all customary protection, they wanted a more interventionist policy and were presumably satisfied with the economic Terror. (It was this authoritarian, anticapitalist, and protectionist aspect of the Terror that Louis Blanc had so admired.) Some revolutionaries were therefore not only indifferent but hostile to many of the modernizing and reformist enterprises embarked on, first by the monarchy and then by successive revolutionary regimes.

It is unfortunate that Schama does not develop in more depth this intriguing and original theme of antimodernism. One can only speculate as to the reasons. Perhaps in a work that is chiefly synthetic rather than based on original research, he lacked the evidence to develop this point further, or perhaps he feared that, had he continued along this line of argument, he would have found himself trapped by his own hypothesis in a Hegelian model that emphasizes a dialectic of economic forces controlling history, a paradigm at odds with his preferred vision of random individual agencies. At any rate, the implications of his theory of an antimodernist revolution are potentially far-reaching. I wonder whether this reactionary spirit is not the other side of the idealistic and humanitarian tradition of the Revolution and whether these two trends, one regressive and one progressive, both rooted in the Revolution, do not continue to characterize French political life. Here categories of left and right mislead rather than elucidate; the antimodernist spirit can belong to the Revolution, as Schama has shown, as well as to the most counterrevolutionary elements in society. The protectionism and paternalism that Louis Blanc praised as the harbinger of socialism implied, in the 1880s, nationalism, xenophobia, the cult of the French soil, as well as anticapitalism disguised as and nourished by anti-Semitism. Mid-nineteenth-century socialists on the left as well as late nineteenth-century conservatives on the right, allied with a petty bourgeoisie hostile to capitalism, could both appeal to a similar nostalgia for the past and similar fear of a future determined by a free international marketplace economy dominated by mercantile Anglo-Saxon nations.

Nevertheless, the breadth and depth of Schama's achievement are remarkable. In essence, he has succeeded in masterfully fusing the two principle traditions in the historiography of the French Revolution – Michelet's narrative strategy of resurrecting the past in all its color and particularity and Tocqueville's analytic examination of institutions and trends. Bringing together Michelet's emphasis on individual lives and personalities and Tocqueville's conservative reflections, Schama has written a brilliant and compelling chronicle of a Revolution in which change was an illusion and violence the reality.

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Steven Marcus

REINVENTING THE REVOLUTION

Citizens, A Chronicle of the French Revolution by Simon Schama has made a great popular success, and it is largely a merited one. It sums up and brings to bear in one volume a generation of revisionist historical research on the French Revolution and puts it forward in spirited and sustained form. Whatever critical observations I have to make in what follows, and they are considerable, should not be regarded as ingratitudes but as the questionings and perplexities of an improved and sympathetic reader.

Schama's intention, he lets us know from the outset, is to present his work "in the form of a narrative." Instead of arguments embodied as "structural" analysis, he presents us with arguments imbedded in accounts of human behavior – speech, action, dress, manners, writing, painting. And since the Revolution was in such considerable measure a "haphazard and chaotic event," he does not actually write a single, encompassing narrative as he at first appears to claim. The book is a kind of immense mosaic, put together out of highly selected but brief narrative-like episodes, many disparate stories aspiring to become something larger than a connection of anecdotes. Schama's descriptive subtitle, "A Chronicle of the French Revolution," requires similar commentary. *Citizens* does indeed in general pursue events in chronological order, but it is not a chronicle in the traditional and slightly archaic use of that term, in which chronicles stood somewhere along a developmental line between annals (which were driven by chronology alone) and fully evolved and conscious historical writing. Schama's work is in fact largely made up of exceptionally dense and often elliptical verbal representations. Its narratives are frequently occluded, and the book would have profited from the chronological charts of dates, names, and events that earlier histories sometimes included as an aid in dispelling the opacity of historical action. Hence, despite its fleeting disclaimers, *Citizens* is a full-fledged historical reading of the French Revolution. It argues a thesis, or set of theses, by means of its truncated or fragmentary narratives; and if, unlike its nineteenth-century precursors, it is not epic in either form or intention – indeed it is a kind of anti-epic – it nonetheless conveys an elaborate and self-conscious historical interpretation and is a work of considerable ideological impetus. Although Schama pays due lip service to the "contingencies" of historical phenomena, there is not enough contingency in his accounts of them. He is all certitude and polemical fervor, often though not always to startling effect.

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Schama begins in the conventional way by setting the general pre-Revolutionary scene, which was characterized by unremitting and intractable fiscal crises. As a result of an accumulation of myriad circumstances, notable among them the wars fought by France in North America, the French government was more or less going broke. Deeply in debt, the government was unable to borrow new money to keep itself going or to service the interest on what it already owed. Repeated efforts at fiscal reform were uniformly unavailing. At the same time, however, pre-Revolutionary France was the scene of both social and cultural changes that were revolutionary in magnitude and implications. The sources of social change were located not in a rising middle class or unenfranchised bourgeoisie but in a relatively youthful and disaffected aristocracy. This aristocracy was also liberal, rationalistic and modernizing in its attitudes. Such a nobility had already been thoroughly "colonized by what modern historians think of as 'bourgeois' values: money, public service and talent." At the very heart of the French elite, then, was "a capitalist nobility." This group, for all practical purposes indistinguishable from the opulent bourgeoisie, was willy-nilly going to lead France toward revolution; in its commitment to reform it would unconsciously prepare the way for the dismantling of the old order of which it was itself a leading element.

In the illimitable realm of culture, changes of analogous substantiality were occurring. France was becoming a vast, open, public theater. There was a pervasive shift in taste toward styles and behavior that were taken to be expressive of inner "sensibility," tenderness of emotion and "naturalness" of responsiveness and self-representation. The chief causal agency in this context is to be found in the figure, writings and cult of Rousseau – from the public campaign urging mothers to breast-feed their infants to the new ideas of child-rearing, education, religion and public virtue, Rousseau was the symbol of a proto-Romantic tidal flow of feeling and intensity that was also to be revolutionary in its influences. This tendency, essentially counter- or anti-Enlightenment in its impulsions, was to become dominant in the life of the Revolution itself, and it occupies the forefront of Schama's account as well. That account does not in effect regard the Revolution as in some superordinate sense an outcome of the Enlightenment. For in Schama's view, the Old Regime was itself the Enlightenment's chief institutional embodiment; it was, all things considered, progressive, reformist and modernizing, and was convinced of the superior usefulness of the capitalization of property and the overriding efficacy of economic rationality. The Revolution, however, was on this score antimodern in the sense that it was at key moments of decision opposed to the specific kinds of reforms that modernization required. Put in this way, one can already apprehend certain doctrinal leanings.

In any event, by 1787, according to Schama, it was fairly clear that

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reform from above was not going to work. The economic crisis that focussed upon the government's inability to raise additional revenues joined with a political crisis that had at its center demands for broader "representation" in elected political bodies and created together a situation of continual instability. And the error then, as the error today similarly continues to be, was to think that a solution of the political crisis through an increase or democratization of representation would in any way lead to a quick, or even not-so-quick, alleviation of the economic calamities that afflicted the nation. In addition, the political troubles had a life of their own, for their continuous exacerbation symbolized the circumstance that the Old Regime was gradually being delegitimized. Nevertheless, right up through the early phases of the Revolution two collective voices remain poised in potential conflict among the forces that pressed for change: one was rational, cool, liberal, moderate, capitalist, and reformist; the other was passionate and moralistic, and articulated desires for justice, community, fraternity, fairness, and virtue. Put in larger terms, these may be thought of as Liberal versus Radical, Instrumental versus Expressive, Rationalistic versus Romantic, or as the ethic of responsibility versus the ethic of ultimate ends. Because the latter term in each of these oppositions was given unexampled free play, the French when they came to register their grievances and elect their first representatives in 1789 were able to connect "social distress with political change. That had not happened in Britain in 1688 nor for that matter in American in 1776, and it would prove the crucial difference." This connection, of course, created the explosive mixture that made the French Revolution into an event of world-shaking importance, and Schama allows that although "social structure did not cause the French Revolution, social issues did," which seems somehow both to concede and finesse the question. Nevertheless, because of this connection, Schama goes on, it was bound to happen that whenever long-term economic policy needs came into conflict with immediate social distress, the demands of the latter succeeded in gaining priority, and the antimodernizing and antimarket forces and sentiments impelled the Revolution along increasingly Radical lines. Why this should unfailingly have occurred goes more or less unexplained and unexplored.

The first great climax comes, naturally, with the 14th of July, 1789. Schama writes a fine chapter of vignettes and moments of dramatic action about that day. He is not very clear or coherent on the continuous determining pressures that eventuated in particular groups of occurrences – his narrative is not old-fashioned in that sense. He is, however, exceptionally good on the drama, the theatricality, the spectacularity and public display of the great Revolutionary *journeés* – and on the literalization in people's behavior of the drama of history and the stage on which these actors self-con-

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sciously played out their momentary parts. They are indeed momentary, and Schama specializes in the presentation of fragments of discontinuous action. Here, for example, is a moment from the extremely bloody day of August 10, 1792. Early in the morning, before the fighting had begun in earnest, the King went to the Legislative Assembly, which was meeting in the Manège near the Tuileries, to place his own person in its trust:

> Once in the Manège, where a handful of deputies remained . . . the King was left waiting while a place was found for him and his family compatible with the prohibition on his presence during debates. Together with his sister Elizabeth, Marie-Antoinette and their children, they were finally rushed into the little caged space of the Logographie, assigned to reporters recording the proceedings. Inside this stuffy little hole, their faces shadowed by the cell-like grille, what was left of the French monarchy waited, helplessly, on its fate.

This paragraph is a representative sample of Schama's narrative style. It may not be excessive to suggest that it owes something substantial to television broadcasting, and that it is a TV news-spot in prose, a kind of image bite. Indeed in its unself-conscious emphasis upon the intermittent in its representations of extended action, there is something of what might be called academic postmodern history attaching to the book as a whole.

With the fall of the Bastille the Revolution emerges into its most significant symbolic life. The bloody fighting in Paris and the public display of "punitive sacrifice[s]" that it entailed constituted "a kind of Revolutionary sacrament." Even more, it was the event in which for Schama there was sealed "the modern compact by which power could be secured through violence." It isn't evident what is specially or particularly "modern" about this circumstance. Violence exists at the heart of organized political life, particularly as we observe that life in the nation-state and those associations which have been its predecessors. And it exists as well at the center of the political theory upon which Schama entirely and inexplicitly depends, the theory of Max Weber. The state, Weber writes, is "a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory." It is "a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i. e. considered to be legitimate) violence." On these terms Schama understands the great events of the Revolution as exposing a "vacuum of authority . . . at the heart of the French government." In other words, the Revolution was, among countless other things, an immense and protracted crisis of legitimacy. But having said this, Schama then

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goes on at once to declare that it was "violence which made the Revolution in the first place," which is to curtail and obscure the sequential relations between the breakdown of legitimate authority and the breaking out of revolutionary violence.

And he does this repeatedly. One great question, he writes, dogs the French Revolution through its entire history. "What is the relationship between violence and legitimacy? . . . Only when the state restored to itself a monopoly of force – as it was to do in 1794 – would the question go away. In this sense, at least, Robespierre would be the first successful counter-revolutionary." Fair enough, one responds, if not too clever by half – as Schama plays hob (not to say Hobbes) with certain received notions. Yet two pages later he asserts, "The Terror was merely 1789 with a higher body count. From the first year it was apparent that violence was not just an unfortunate side effect from which enlightened Patriots could selectively avert their eyes; it was the Revolution's source of collective energy. It was what made the Revolution revolutionary." Like Lady Macbeth's spot, this won't wash. To begin with, violence in this context tends to expand and become everything, both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary, in its destructive inclusiveness. In addition, Schama attributes to violence, both here and elsewhere in the book, a kind of mysterious autonomy, or sovereign causal potency, that he simply asserts but neither explains, argues, nor tries to demonstrate. Through such an ascription, Schama virtually makes violence into the content of the Revolution rather than the decisive or specific means for politics itself that it is. And this maneuver permits him as well to avoid having to deal with the role of violence, implicit and overt, in everyday political life as well as in the historic life of the Old Regime, and indeed of European political society as a whole in the eighteenth century.

To be sure, Schama cannot entirely overlook such actual revolutionary transferences of social power as those that were entailed in the expropriation and sale at auction of the enormous properties of the Church, although he makes very little of them. Nor does he direct much attention to such other Enlightenment-inspired reforms as the changes in the calendar, in weights and measures, in the geographical redistricting of France, or in the system of *assignats*. Instead he focuses upon the public drama and the heightened rhetoric, the spectacles and collective self-displays of revolutionary France. If in a social sense the Revolution "merely accelerated trends that had been taking place over a longer period of time," in the sense of political behavior the changes were much more radical, and brought forth "a political culture in which the liberation of disrespect literally knew no bounds." A "polemical incontinence" washed over, or flushed through, the entire nation. If this makes the French Revolution seem like an early, large-scale preview of the 1960s,

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it is no accident; such teleologies are integral to Schama's design. For him, the Revolution was both inevitable and revolutionary, but it was almost without exception for the bad and the worse.

Part of the problem with such an extraordinarily uniform view is to be located in Schama's conception of the modern and the antimodern. He regards the modern in the context of 1789-1794 as those views that would have led to further physiocratic and capitalist reforms and to a "rational," market-governed economy and society. And he sees antimodernism as expressed in those radical groups that strove for short-term "economic and social justice," and who used the rhetoric of Rousseau against the financiers and plutocrats who had come to power during that epoch. One difficulty with this reading has to do with the restricted notions of both the modern and Rousseau that it conveys. For it is at least equally true to say that Rousseau was one of the first of modern thinkers as it is to say that he was opposed to modernizing tendencies. Like Burke, who was of course antagonistic to him on other grounds, Rousseau was intransigently hostile to certain Enlightenment and rationalistic tendencies that were often carried to excess in the eighteenth century. His modernity is in part to be found in the circumstance that – again like Burke – he is one of the first writers of transcendent intellectual gifts consciously to enlist the powers of the mind against the mind itself – to use his exceptional literary powers even to excess against the powers of rationalism and its excesses. Because Schama underemphasizes or overlooks the hypertrophic rationalism of certain tendencies in the Revolution ("The Sleep of Reason Gives Birth to Monsters") and concomitantly regards its course as essentially a series of Romanticist effervescent outbursts, he gives us a view of that immense development that is both teleological and in part misleading.

This discrimination may to a certain degree explain the otherwise inexplicable independent power that Schama insistently attributes to the role of violence in the Revolution. "Bloodshed was not the unfortunate by-product of revolution," he typically reiterates; "it was the source of its energy." We understand these unsupported sentiments better if we recognize that for Schama the French Revolution leads directly to modern totalitarianism, and not so much to Stalinism as to Nazi Germany – his analogies almost uniformly tend in this direction. For example, the Terror and the massacres in the Vendée involve a whole set of "sinister anticipations of the technological killings of the twentieth century." The industrialization of mass murder has really only one modern referent. Similarly, the case against Marie Antoinette and those who followed her to the guillotine during the Terror was based on the idea that she was essentially "impure" in body, thought, and deed. The idea of purity resonates with the myth of racial purity rather than with

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Revolutionary orthodoxy or loyalty to the Party line. Jacques Louis David's plan for relandscaping the Champs Elysées as a Jardin National for mass spectacles and patriotic games brings forth the comparison to Albert Speer. And Fouquier-Tinville, the methodical hatchet-man of the Revolutionary Tribunal, is compared to the inevitable Eichmann: "twentieth-century readers will recognize an ideal instrument of mass killing in the mild-mannered family man who pleaded that he had always obeyed the law and done his duty." These comparisons are telling because they emerge out of Schama's fundamental interpretation of the Revolution, which is to read it as primarily a sequence of momentary triumphs of irrational impulses and not as well as a series of rationalisms gone desperately astray.

Modern opinion in general has held that if there is a mediated line of inheritance that descends from the French Revolution, it issues in our own century in the Russian Revolution and in its subsequent monstrous perversions not only of the ideals of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, but also of the entire tradition of radical, secular, social, and socialist idealisms. Schama is of course no apologist for tyranny of any sort – and he is, of course, anti-Marxist – but his book tends on the whole, though not altogether, to skirt this filiation. Because he depicts the French Revolution in the main as an enormous conglomeration of woeful disasters and tawdry, bloody messes, he is unable to imagine it as a historical tragedy. Accordingly, Schama is at his best in his accounts of the most radical period, from August 1792 to July 1794, when the Terror ends in Thermidor. We get a very good sense of how through the Committee of Public Safety a strong, centralized authority substituted the violence of the revolutionary state for the popular violence of the revolutionary street crowds. We do not, however, get much sense of how France was actually governed during this period, as we do from such a volume as R. R. Palmer's *Twelve Who Ruled: The Year of the Terror in the French Revolution*. Instead we get a gripping set of descriptions of trials, judicial and nonjudicial murders, beheadings, desperate speechifyings and hysterical last hours, and of the gigantic, and mostly shabby, public festivals of the civil religion of the Revolution that also marked this unexampled historical era. Schama creates an extraordinary rendering of the murder of Marat by Charlotte Corday and of David's super-spectacular production of Marat's posthumous rites. He surveys the new "empire of images" that Robespierre and his associates attempted to realize in their "Rousseauan cultural revolution." Yet it is telling once again that in his discussion of the revolutionary calendar, the most arresting bit of evidence that Schama brings forward is "the voluptuous incarnations of Salvatore Tresca's illustrations," namely, the first calendar girls.

What was it all in aid of? It was certainly not in behalf of the

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"bourgeoisie," since that class, "which Marxist history long believed to be the essential beneficiaries of the Revolution was, in fact, its principal victim." If one has to find a beneficiary it is that problematical creation of the Revolution, "the juridical entity of the citizen." Such a creature is problematical for Schama because "no sooner had this hypothetical free person been invented than his liberties were circumscribed by the police powers of the state." And that state, which was a new "military-technocratic" entity of "immense power and emotional solidarity" went along with "a political culture" that simultaneously challenged it. What happened between 1789 and 1793 was "an unprecedented explosion of politics – in speech, print, image, and even music." Frenchmen (and some women) found their voice, but they did so finally through violence, "which was the motor of the Revolution." The theatrical posturings of 1789 made the public atrocities of 1793 possible. The political culture of both was tinctured with "the same morbid preoccupation with the just massacre and the heroic death . . . with the Romanticization of violence."

These less than satisfactory closing remarks are more in the way of summarizing repetition than they are conclusions to a persuasively coherent narrative/analysis. Schama's work is, as I have said, the first widely popular example of a reorientation that has occurred during the past twenty years among historians of the French Revolution. A generation ago there was something like a consensus among historians on the correctness of a fundamentally social analysis of the Revolution. That convention has been largely eclipsed – particularly through the works of such writers as François Furet and Norman Hampson – and has been replaced by an agreement on the primacy of a fundamentally political analysis. This shift has been described as representing a movement from Marx to Tocqueville, and it has also been understood as a refraction of alterations in the ideological climate of the present. I see no reason to doubt the reasonableness of such suppositions or to impugn the importance of the contributions that this change in perspective has enabled historians to make. In the instance of Schama's book, however, the matter is less certain, in part at least because the shift of perspective in it is so much in the foreground. But such an emphasis serves only to bring forward another problem.

For this kind of thing has been done before, and since it was achieved in the work of the same great historical analyst whose political categories have proved decisive for Schama, the coincidence is doubly telling. In 1904-5, Max Weber published the first version of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. This work was also in some important measure undertaken as a polemic against and corrective to certain Marxist views of both the Reformation and the formation of modern capitalism. At the end of his famous chapter on Luther's notion of the calling, Weber pauses to

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expound his conceptual and analytical aims:

> The following study may thus . . . form a contribution to understanding of the manner in which ideas become effective forces in history. . . . [W]e are merely attempting to clarify the part which religious forces have played in forming the developing web of our specifically worldly modern culture, in the complex interaction of innumerable historical factors. . . . At the same time we must free ourselves from the idea that it is possible to deduce the Reformation, as a historically necessary result, from certain economic changes. Countless historical circumstances, which cannot be reduced to any economic law, and are not susceptible of economic explanation of any sort, especially purely political processes, had to concur in order that the newly created Churches should survive at all.
>
> On the other hand, however, we have no intention whatever of maintaining such a foolish or doctrinaire thesis as that the spirit of capitalism . . . could have arisen only as the result of certain effects of the Reformation. . . . In view of the tremendous confusion of interdependent influences between the material basis, the forms of social and political organization, and the ideas current in the time of the Reformation, we can proceed only by investigating whether and at what points certain correlations between forms of religious belief and practical ethics can be worked out.

If Schama's work is devoted to recreating the political culture of the French Revolution, then Weber's project was to analyze the spiritual and intellectual culture of the capitalist revolution. In addition, Weber's essay is one of the preeminent early examples of the kind of discourse analysis that Schama and other contemporary historians sometimes seem to assume was invented in the late 1960s. I introduce this example at such length in order to demonstrate that a historical analysis which disagrees with certain Marxist interpretations of the past need not be as one-sided as the readings it aims to replace. For one of the points about Weber's interpretation is that it provides room within itself for the perspectives that it is also disputing. Schama's does not, and in the degree that it does not falls short of the highest standards as either narrative account or historiographical argument. In being bound so closely to polemical and ideological contentions, his history loses some of the additional distinction which it might otherwise have attained. An event of such incomparable magnitude and depth as the French Revolution requires from its historians a larger amplitude and generosity of intellectual spirit.

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Raymond J. Wilson

DELMORE SCHWARTZ AND *PURGATORY*

The words, "In dreams begin responsibilities," which Delmore Schwartz employed for the title of one of his best-known stories, derive from William Butler Yeats. Attributing them to an "Old Play," Yeats wrote, "'*In dreams begins responsibility*'" as the motto for his 1914 book, *Responsibilities*. This connection begins a chain of thought that leads to an even more striking link between the two writers: similarities extend far enough between Schwartz's story "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" and Yeats's late play *Purgatory* that placing the two works side by side illuminates differences and promotes an understanding of both story and play, qualities that are independent of historical explanation.

Schwartz's story shows startling similarities to the play that Richard Ellmann considered Yeats's best: *Purgatory*. Both story and play show a son viewing the crucial moment leading to his own conception, a moment in the parents' doomed relationship. In both, the son calls out futilely for the parents to stop their actions before they lead to scandal and unhappiness. Each son says that the parents must avoid the conception of someone as vile as himself. Schwartz's story is a dream; Yeats's play has notable dream-like characteristics, and it contains a thematically crucial motif of dreams. Both physical settings consist of a darkened area containing the son and a rectangle of light within which the parents act. Both stories contain a theme of lengthy or endless repetition which is in some way connected to a horse or horses.

Even such great similarities would not surprise people who noticed them if one could assume that the youthful Schwartz had found inspiration, either conscious or unconscious, in a work by the world-renowned elder poet. However, facts rule out an imitative Schwartz as the explanation because Schwartz wrote his story three years before Yeats wrote his play. Schwartz wrote "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" and showed it to friends in 1935 and published it in *Partisan Review* in the fall of 1937. Yeats began writing *Purgatory* in the spring of 1938, and the first performance occurred later that year.

Although the great differences between Yeats and Schwartz provide an unexpected context for the already odd notion of Yeats following the lead of a twenty-five-year-old American, the detailed quality of their similarities is too intriguing to be easily dismissed. In his story, Schwartz's narrator describes his mother and father on an outing to Coney Island sometime before

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their marriage. The man "asks my mother to marry him," and she "begins to cry," and says, "It's all I've wanted from the first moment I saw you." For Yeats, "This is the anniversary / Of my mother's wedding night, / Or of the night wherein I was begotten." This son's mother, too, had "Looked at [the father] and married him." Yeats's speaker expresses uncertainty about which evening he sees, and the uncertainty mutes the slight difference between the scenes.

Also, the scenes' similar thematic function emerges when Schwartz's observing son "stood up . . . and shouted: 'Don't do it! It's not too late to change your minds, both of you.'" This compares to Yeats's observer shouting, "Don't let him touch you!" Schwartz's son pleads with his parents to avoid the "remorse, hatred, scandal" bound to arise from their decision to marry. Though Schwartz's scandal remains undefined, the phrase fits thematically with the Yeatsian character's tale of how his father had "squandered everything she had . . . To pay what he had lost at cards / Or spent on horses, drink and women."

Even more strikingly parallel is the element of self-hatred in each son's begging of the parent to leave him unconceived. In addition to the remorse, hatred, and scandal, Schwartz's character says, "Nothing good will come of it, only . . . two children whose characters are monstrous," and Yeats's lines are as follows: "And if he touch he must beget / And you must bear his murderer." Schwartz was one of two sons, as may be the case for his narrator in this highly autobiographical tale. Correspondingly, we find that Yeats's play also deals with two undeserving male results of the marriage – a son and grandson, rather than with two sons.

In both works, the emotional atmosphere arises in a dreamlike setting. Schwartz's story retells a dream, but for most of it, the reader must deduce the dream quality from the story's features. Occurring in the title, the word "dream" suggests this possibility, and the narrative's dream-like characteristics allow the reader to guess the story's dream status long before the tale ends. However, the narrator does not specifically name the experience a dream until the story's last paragraph when he says, "I woke up into the bleak winter morning of my twenty-first birthday." There are dream-like qualities in *Purgatory* as well. Viewing the parents' ongoing Purgatory, the son explains that the dead reenact their transgressions until the consequences of their transgressions are no more. The son says, "For when the consequence is at an end / The dream must end." Yeats centers his plot on the son's desire to free his mother from her dream, and when he fails, he claims, "Her mind cannot hold up that dream."

The Old Man hints at the dream's literary context when he says, "'Then the bride-sleep fell upon Adam': / Where did I read those words?"

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Perhaps he had read them in one of the "old books . . . made fine / By eighteenth-century French binding, books / Modern and ancient, books by the ton," in his childhood house. A passage from a seventeenth-century book, popular in the eighteenth century, contains the elements of "Adam," "bride," "dream," and temptation (possibly sexual temptation); the lines tell what Sir Hudibras knew in Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*: "What Adam dreamt of when his Bride / Came from her Closet in his side: / Whether the Devil tempted her." As with Schwartz, dream provides the link between possibility and actuality.

The dream aura derives partially in both works from their similar physical setting. In both, the son views events from darkness, and the parents act within a rectangle of light. "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" contains a darkened theater in which the narrator sits watching an old-fashioned film. *Purgatory* places the parental action in a mysteriously lighted window in the charred wall of a burnt-out house. When we imagine Yeats's play in actual performance, the parallel becomes more striking, since the actual theater (the physical, brick and wooden building) would even more closely match Schwartz's dream theater. Schwartz's narrator unsuccessfully attempts to influence his parents; he can have no effect, perhaps because their bodies are not present, only their projected images. Similarly, Yeats's son, an old man in the play, finds his parents "Deaf! Both deaf! And if I should throw / A stick or a stone they would not hear." At first the speaker presumes that he has lost his wits – that he is going through a waking nightmare, an interpretation that would be close to Schwartz's sleeping nightmare.

Both writers connect repetition to horses even though such a linkage does not derive from an obvious, widely-held metaphorical convention – as, for example, a writer might use sheep to represent a character's lack of independence. Eternal repetition emerges from two horse images in Schwartz's story: merry-go-round horses and horse waves. The narrator's parents are "riding on the merry-go-round," signaling a circular, repetitive relationship: "My father is on a black horse, my mother on a white one, and they seem to be making an eternal circuit." This horse image of repetition reinforces that of the ocean as viewed earlier by the narrator's mother who had watched as "again and again the pony waves are released"; these horse waves "arch their backs," showing "white veins in the green and black" and "finally crack, dashing fiercely upon the sand, actually driving, full force downward, against it." Like using sheep to imply excessive submissiveness, waves forever striking a beach are a conventional notation for repetitiveness, but Schwartz's linking repetition to horses is not standard.

Likewise, when Yeats connects the sound of a horse's hoofbeats to the idea of purgatorial repetition, he keeps it free from any wider code. Instead,

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he makes the linkage arise dramatically from the son's refusal to believe the obvious fact that he cannot influence the events that he observes. When shouting fails, and he concludes that throwing an object would have no better effect, the son decides that he must kill his own son, his mother's grandson. Stabbing the boy, the Old Man sings a garbled version of Walter Scott's "Lullaby of an Infant Chief," a poem that not only mentions that the child's father was a knight and his mother a lady, but speaks of guardians whose "blades would be red" with the blood of anyone trying to harm the baby. After reddening his blade with his son's blood, the Old Man explains that he has freed his mother from her purgatorial repetition, by removing the last consequence of her act:

> I finished all that consequence.
> I killed that lad because had he grown up
> He would have struck a woman's fancy,
> Begot, and passed pollution on.

Suddenly, he hears hoofbeats, the play's indication that the mother's purgatorial reliving of her sin will continue in spite of his misguided effort.

The protagonist's reaction to the horse's approach reinforces the theme of repetition. "Twice a murderer," says the Yeats character who had earlier told of killing his father, "and all for nothing. / And she must animate that dead night / Not once but many times!" While the character calls out for God to free his mother from her seemingly endless repetitive action with her groom husband, to release "my mother's soul from its dream!", the approach of the horse has already elicited the reader's sorrow for the never-ending repetition. Like Schwartz, Yeats achieves his effect by reference to his own text, not to a storehouse of conventional metaphors. The audience never sees the horse in Yeats's play, and Schwartz's horses are either waves or wooden ones on a carousel, so both writers also offset their equine images. However, when both authors yoke horses to eternal repetitiveness, another commonality arrests the reader's attention. These connections merit an exploration of their possible implications.

Such extensive and precise similarities make the option of coincidence unlikely, while the idea that Yeats influenced Schwartz, although potentially supported by the tribute which Schwartz gave to Yeats in his title, cannot overcome the earlier composition date of "Dreams." Factual information contained in letters and memoirs means that Schwartz could not have gained access to an advance manuscript of *Purgatory*, nor have heard a parlor read-through of it, nor even have spoken with someone who had experienced one of these opportunities.

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Consideration of Goethe's *Faust* supplies a possible independent source, but it forms a possibility we ultimately must reject. Even so, in comparing and contrasting two sections of Goethe's play with the works of Schwartz and Yeats, we clarify the relationship among all three. First, in Part II, Act II, Goethe depicts the influence of Pompey's and Caesar's powerful personalities which create "an after-vision" on the anniversary of a battle's eve. "How often it has repeated, how often will it repeat, year after year after year, for the rest of time," says Erichtho, Goethe's spokeswoman. The event, as in Yeats, emerges from flawed character, for Goethe says, "Men who cannot master their inner selves are all too ready in their arrogance to dominate their neighbours." The element of annual return also ties the *Faust* episode to *Purgatory* because Yeats's concept in *A Vision* calls for, not annual reliving of the experience, but perpetual reenactment, through all days of the year, or even in a timeless realm – on Earth but beyond this earthly limitation.

Another relevant section suggests further possibilities; in Part II, Act I, Faust makes a magic stage, causing tapestries to vanish, and puts on a spirit-vision play, a silent pageant upon which the audience comments – a pattern similar to that of *Purgatory* and "Dreams." We could credit Schwartz with the added ingenuity, if this were a source for "Dreams," of transforming the scene to the modern magic stage, the cinema. In this scene, Paris tries to abduct and rape Helen, who represents the ideal feminine beauty to which Faust has impetuously sworn devotion "in affection, love, worship, yes in madness." Faust calls out to stop Paris: "Can't you hear? Stop. This is too much," to which Mephistopheles asks, "Aren't you the man that's putting it on, this crazy ghost-play?" Paris is not Faust's father and neither is Helen his mother, but Faust has, at least, summoned Helen from "The Mothers," who are "goddesses throned in solitude, outside of place, outside of time," rulers of a vast emptiness and solitude.

Even so, the idea of *Faust* as a common source fails to explain enough to warrant acceptance. It provides no explanation for the close timing of the two compositions by Yeats and Schwartz, nor for many details common to the modern works. Both of these depict the moment leading to the son's conception. They show the vile self-hatred of the two sons, which is almost the exact opposite of the personality of Goethe's Faust; the scandal in the parents' life; the woman falling in love at first look, in contrast to Goethe's Helen whom Paris assaulted; the Sophoclean echoes of Schwartz and the Sophoclean tone which critics like Richard Ellmann and Lionel Trilling have noticed in *Purgatory*. Finally, Goethe does not haunt Faust with horses, intimating eternal repetition; in fact, in line with the famous wager with Mephistopheles, Faust escapes damnation because he never asks for a moment's pause from new experiences. Therefore, accepting the common

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source in *Faust* would still leave numerous features for which the explanation does not account.

The final possibility, that Schwartz's story influenced Yeats, must overcome an initial skepticism. Yeats, most people would think, would have been unlikely to have drawn inspiration from the obscure, youthful American. And Yeats's play employs ideas he had developed in *A Vision*, which he published in 1937, but upon which he had worked for decades. In addition, the well-known Yeats – one would think – is unlikely to have immediately read and instantly adopted motifs from Schwartz's book *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, which was published in 1938, the year Yeats was working on the play.

However, "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," was initially published, not in the 1938 book, but in the first number of the revived *Partisan Review*, whose editors had reputations far more advanced than Schwartz's: Philip Rahv, William Phillips, F. W. Dupee, and Dwight Macdonald. "Dreams" became the centerpiece of a rather significant moment in intellectual history, which might have caught Yeats's attention. According to James Atlas, Macdonald remembered that the editors "decided at once to place [Schwartz's story] in the front of their first issue, before contributions from Edmund Wilson, Lionel Trilling, Sidney Hook, James T. Farrell, and even Picasso." Schwartz's story also preceded work by Wallace Stevens and James Agee. Within a few years many major authors were to publish in the magazine, including an article on Yeats by Auden and contributions by Barzun, Bellow, Eliot, Jarrell, Kazin, Robert Lowell, Roethke, Tate, and William Carlos Williams. Archibald MacLeish's 1938 *Yale Review* article on Yeats drew high praise from the poet at the time Yeats was writing *Purgatory*, and MacLeish also later published in *Partisan Review*.

Furthermore, Yeats's friends, recognizing Schwartz's title as a tip of the hat to Yeats, might have shown the new *Partisan Review* to him. Since Schwartz is seeing the world in this story at least partly through a pair of spectacles tinted by Yeats, Yeats might have found the story congenial to his imagination. If Yeats read the story, it could have lodged in his mind like a seed, been watered by his powerful, transforming imagination, and borne fruit without his considering the seed's origin. The facts of timing also work in favor of the Schwartz-Yeats line of influence: from the fall of 1937 when the story was published, to March 1938 when Yeats announced that he had begun work on the play. This timeline provides a half-year incubation period for Yeats's adaptation and transformation of the source material.

In the case of Schwartz's 1935-written story influencing Yeats's 1938 writing of the play, the similarities form a solid background. Against this background, Yeats's original contributions stand out. While Schwartz warns

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against shirking responsibility, Yeats demonstrates the consequences of so doing. The first difference is that between realistic short story and poetic drama. By being narrative, "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" creates two centers of interest. A twenty-one-year-old experiences a dream, and his past-time story strikes the reader immediately; but consideration of the narrative form reveals a second center of interest, the present-time narrator. The slightly older narrator is free of the corrosive compulsion for self-exculpatory rhetoric. The tone embodies the genre-based contrast; drama, except by artificial devices such as the voice-over in a film, does not permit the particular duplicity by which Schwartz presents his character.

Secondly, Yeats's old-man protagonist is oriented to the past, while Schwartz's young man accepts responsibility for his future, a difference that highlights the theme of self-rejection or self-acceptance. The oldster has already allowed hatred and resentment to spoil his life, hatred of his father and resentment toward his mother for accepting the father. He extended his self-rejection to the woman who accepted him and to their son. The man had not taught the youth to read because "I gave the education that befits / A bastard that a pedlar got / Upon a tinker's daughter in a ditch." Mutual hatred simmers between the Old Man and the boy, beginning in the first line of the poem. Yeats's Old Man rejects even the little time remaining to him, claiming that his being a "wretched foul old man" makes him "harmless," and therefore not a significant consequence of his mother's action. Yeats's Old Man says he had "No good trade, but good enough / Because I am my father's son." The line embodies the Old Man's theme in elemental form; he is the consequence of his parents' action, and the future is only further parental consequence, not the Old Man's chosen course of action. In killing the boy, the Old Man tries to stop the future, under the delusion that to do so will free his mother from the past, that he would, in effect, be changing that past. Trapped in endless repetition, the Old Man has ceased striving for the new – or possibly he had never striven – which in Goethe's *Faust* means damnation, but which for Yeats means Purgatory.

In contrast, Schwartz's young narrator has accepted the dream in two ways: *as a dream* and as *his* dream. The first means that the youth has recognized that the dream's rejection of life does not make for success in waking reality; the second implies that the dreamer accepts the dream as his own production. These acceptances suggest that he realizes, in Elisa New's words, that the "dreamer is not mere spectator, but also producer; not passive, but culpable; not a child unborn who will avert catastrophe, but an adult who airs and profits from that catastrophe." This insight suggests that the narrator will confront and overcome fear of the future when he quietly "woke up into the bleak winter morning" of his "twenty-first birthday," the

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first day of official adult responsibility. The word "responsibility" in the title implies that the dream ends with the narrator's acceptance of self-governance. Thus, the dream of Schwartz's story, reduced to its elements, states the opposite theme in two parts: I dreamed that my actions are my parents' fault, but then I woke up.

Most deeply, recognizing "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" as a source for *Purgatory* clarifies that Yeats's Old Man sinned most vilely in rejecting his parents. But in doing so he abdicated responsibility for his actions, stagnated his own life in self-hatred, and condemned those around him to literal or figurative death.

Coming in

Partisan Review:

- Mario Vargas Llosa: *The Country to Come*
- Julia Kristeva on the French Revolution
- Helen Frankenthaler: *Thoughts from an Occasional Journal*
- William Phillips: *The Function of Criticism Today*
- Stanislaw Baranczak: *Letter from Poland*
- Philippe Raynaud: *Feminism and the Ancien Régime*
- Louis Simpson: *A Leave of Absence*
- Peter Loewenberg: *The Uses of Anxiety*
- A. B. Yehoshua: *The Israeli Novel*
- Clancy Sigal: *Second Thoughts*
- Anthony Kerrigan: *A Nicaraguan Story*
- Nathan Glazer on Life in the Bronx
- Herbert Gold: *A Blazing Inquest*

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H. J. Kaplan

LETTER FROM PARIS

June 10, 1990

Dear William:

Your letter as you have doubtless surmised by now has followed me here – a few metro stops from the Place du Palais Bourbon, from which *Partisan Review* received its first postwar Paris reports, written if not always signed by yours truly. No sign of a commemorative plaque on Number 8, where my next-door neighbor was the Comtesse de Chambrun. But who in your current crop of readers would recognize that name? Or even that of her father, the infamous Laval? In those days – almost half a century ago! – Stalin and Stalinism seemed forever in the East. Only the West was in question. And here in France, aside from controlling much of the countryside, the Communists held commanding positions in the culture.

Now I expect that the young, who like the poor are always with us, will condescend to us and suggest that we exaggerated the peril. They will be wrong. The worst, as the French like to say, is not always inevitable, but when everything is at stake it is axiomatic that you prepare for the worst. Even your old friend Boris Souvarine, who so tirelessly insisted that Soviet power was built on bluff, was willing to admit that under certain circumstances bluff was enough to win the game. In the event it was enough, quite apart from the poker hands we won and lost, to release counterforces among us – economic, cultural, political – that we now take for granted since, for better or worse, they are what we have become. . . . Which reminds me of the story (guaranteed authentic by another defunct cold warrior, Nicholas Nabokov) about the exiled Berliner who returned to his native city in 1946 and, sitting in a taxi on the way from Tempelhof to his billet somewhere among the rubble, confessed to the driver who had remarked upon his Berliner accent that yes, he had been away for awhile. "For a long while?" the driver wanted to know. "Since 1932, in fact." A silence ensued during which the driver worked his way around some shapeless ruin and at length produced this brief and (according to Nabokov) typically *berlinerisch* observation: "Ah? . . . Well, then, you haven't missed much."

I cannot leave this story without noting that there exist other, non-

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Editor's Note: This piece is a response to a letter from the editor asking Mr. Kaplan to write about the French reaction to the events in Eastern Europe.

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Nabokovian, versions in which the driver, instead of saying "Ah?" says, "*Emmes?*" – a mind-boggling reversion to the pre-Hitler Berliner dialect which as you know was richly truffled with Yiddish. Since this threatens to take us far afield I shall abstain from comment, merely let it stand as a reminder of the extraordinary swiftness and density of our recent history, that is, of the years of your lifetime and mine, so replete with tragic irony that we cannot imagine how to explain ourselves to our children, let alone to theirs.

However that may be, your old correspondent, having returned after many a year to something like residence over here, as opposed to brief trips, feels that he has missed a great deal and that this, precisely, should make him the most useful sort of informant, the ignorant kind, who can let you in on what he finds out for himself. His first reaction, however, was that it may be a bit early (in the spring of 1990) to inquire about the effect on political thinking of the dramatic changes that have taken place and are still taking place to the East. People who have been totally stunned begin by feeling, and *a fortiori* thinking, nothing at all. This is confirmed by all that I have heard and read here in the past two months. Vaguely relieved by the growing prospect of a military stand-down, vaguely pleased by political developments, vaguely concerned about the new shape of things and how they will fit into them, the French have for once failed to react with their customary intellectual exuberance, as if (for the first time since the *philosophes*!) they found themselves at a loss for words. And yet it was not as if the idea of communism had suddenly dropped dead, felled by blast and radiation from the Soviet meltdown. It was already notoriously brain-dead, and certified as such by every French political thinker since Sartre, long before the Soviets called off their dogs in Warsaw and Prague. Hence one must distinguish between the intellectual consequences of the *gradual* demise of Marxism and its various *gauchiste* offshoots (and this would practically amount to a History of Ideas in Postwar France) and reactions to the cataclysmic events of last year, the *annus mirabilis*, during which the firework displays provided by the French government to celebrate the bicentenary of 1789 seemed to be simultaneously saluting the freeing of the Soviet Union's subject peoples, one by one.

Now obviously your correspondent can hope only to deal here with the latter, and in point of fact only with that part of it that falls, as they say here, under his nose. Preoccupied by the problems of reinserting himself into a vastly changed society, and having for the moment little access other than the local press and television to what you refer to so broadly as "political opinion in the West," it seems to me that the most useful contribution I can make to your inquiry would be to begin with the readily observable facts on the ground and work up, or at least back, to the more general concerns ex-

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pressed in your letter.

By facts on the ground I mean politics, the abrasive daily give and take of government and opposition in a democratic society; and the most readily observable fact about politics here is that the subject of your inquiry is not an issue at all. Nor does anyone on either side, both consisting of quite heterogeneous elements, seem to have any expectation or hope of making it one. On the face of it this might seem surprising, in view of the fact that Mitterrand first came to power through an alliance with the Communist Party, then already in decline but more important numerically and intellectually than it is today. The opposition, however, at least since Mitterrand retreated from the nationalizations of the first years and from the inflationary social policies and the old-fashioned "archeo-socialist" rhetoric that went with them, seems for the most part to have resisted any temptation it might have had to recall the common Marxist roots of communism and socialism in France, or to suggest that projects and ideas still cherished by the non-Communist left in this country were in any measure responsible for the economic and social disaster that has been visited upon the peoples of Eastern Europe. The principal reason for this, it seems to me, is that the projects and ideas in question – all involving some increment of governmental assistance to groups and individuals in trouble – are still seen as electorally popular here, whereas free market ideas continue to be regarded with a great deal of ambivalence, and not least by certain elements of the *patronat*, that is, management, itself.

To be sure, all political parties (except the dwindling Communist Party) now officially defend the principle of the market economy – up to the stake, exclusively, as Rabelais put it. In practice everyone expects them to be more or less *dirigiste*, which means to pursue some form of industrial policy. Philosophical liberalism à la Milton Friedman raised its head a few years ago, and produced some books with provocative titles, like *Demain le Capitalisme* (*Forward to Capitalism*), but this line of thinking has yet to root itself deeply here, although it constitutes one of the oldest sub-plots in the history of French social thinking. In its new incarnation, in any case, its chief target was not Marxism as such or Communism (because that would have been tantamount to beating a dead horse) but rather the statism *cum* mercantilism, reminiscent of Colbert and the *ancien régime*, which seems to coopt the most determined French *libéraux* once they are in power. . . . Which is not to say that philosophical liberalism has left no traces and has no future among the intelligentsia; on the contrary, there is a recrudescence of interest in the English classical economists, in Mill, in Burke (a new translation of the *Collected Works* is being prepared by Georges Liébert of Laffont), and of course in such French ancestors as Tocqueville and Jean-Baptiste Say. All this cannot be unrelated to the spectacular bankruptcy of socialism in Eastern Europe. I

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would submit, however, that French *libéralisme* (which corresponds roughly to what has come to be called neoconservatism in the United States) cannot effectively provide what your letter calls a "radical criticism of existing democratic society" without descending into the marketplace and espousing concrete political and social issues, such as taxes, excessive government regulation, immigration and the like; and its proponents, for the most part writers and academics, have thus far shown no interest in doing anything of the sort.

On the other hand, we do have the Le Pen phenomenon, the so-called National Front, a movement on the far right (although in certain areas it draws voting strength from former Communist supporters) which the Socialists and the media, with a little help from their friends in the opposition, have managed to build up into a threat, in my humble opinion not yet a serious one, to democratic institutions. Le Pen may seem only tenuously related to our subject, since his great issues are immigration and law-and-order, and he has been careful not to relate these to any recognizable ideology other than the vague traditionalism of the alleged silent majority in France. But the fact is that he is a skillful right-wing populist operating in a situation all but unprecedented in this country, in which left-wing populism has suddenly thrown in the towel. So we shall want to have a closer look at Le Pen; serious or not, he looms large on the current French scene.

* * *

Where were we, then? Summarizing the effect of the changes taking place in Eastern Europe, it is noteworthy that the French (otherwise much given to conspiracy theories) are not much at odds with each other on what, in fact, has happened – nor, for that matter, *une fois n'est pas coutume*, are they much at odds with us. Everyone agrees that the Russians, having formally and completely conceded defeat in the realm of ideas, were largely responsible for the dissolution of their empire. Full credit is given to Solidarity and to its less fortunate predecessor movements in other countries, as well as to the heroism of individual dissidents, but the Soviet regime had to make a political decision, call off its troops and the K. G. B., allow things to come to pass. In short, they were not just pushed. They chose to jump, and this is important for the future since it means that the Russians, instead of befouling the atmosphere with a doomed and dying despotism, stand some chance at least of participating in the new Europe, now vaguely taking shape, and even receiving the help they so obviously need. In any event, the satellites are now free, and the immediate effect of the from-the-top-down manner in which this happened is that, for the first time in my memory since the battle

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of Stalingrad, the Russians are rather the object of compassion and of wonder than of hatred and fear. Driven presumably by economic impasse, by the clamor of their people and the growing demoralization of the *Nomenklatura* itself, they have given up the effort pursued with so much energy and ingenuity since 1917 to construct a vast Potemkin village designed (with the help of their clients and dupes in the West) to convince the world they were constructing a better society, one that the West would be obliged to respect, fear and pay tribute to, and finally emulate, of course, so that in the words of the old anthem, "The *Internationale* shall be the Human Race." But now, in effect, they are saying: it's no use, it won't work, we have murdered, tortured, and imprisoned millions of people to no avail. The results are pure catastrophe, and there's more: our failure cannot simply be attributed to the inadequacy of our leaders, the mess we inherited, the absence of what the Marxists used to call "objective conditions." No, the project was wrong and rotten from the outset, informed by a false view of man and history, unworkable.

Such a declaration of defeat, redolent perhaps of a certain frenetic Russian literary style but unprecedented, so far as I can see, in the history of any other nation, produced no less effect here than elsewhere as sheer drama. However, for the reasons I have already suggested, it had no discernable effect on political thinking except perhaps to confirm those tendencies – Aronian, sociological, skeptical, but with curious outcroppings of interest in religious phenomenology, for example, Emmanuel Lévinas – already at work here long before the Berlin wall came down; tendencies, I should add, displayed ubiquitously throughout the culture, but most brilliantly exemplified in two relatively new reviews: Pierre Nora's *Le Debat* and Jean-Claude Casanova's *Commentaire*.

Surprised, then, and moved by the swift pace of events, French political thinking seems to be waiting for the dust to settle, *comme tout le monde*. The great upheaval of 1989, after all, was only a beginning. The decline and fall of the Soviet system would now obviously raise the question of Western assistance, change the strategic balance in Europe, open up new economic perspectives, and perhaps even (with the fading of yet one more of the secular religions announced by Nietzsche as a consequence of the alleged demise of God) bring about a rebirth of interest in various approaches to the transcendental, old and new. . . . On all this, it seems to me, the French intelligentsia and the so-called *classe politique* (overlapping but not identical categories) are largely agreed. What has happened is all to the good. What lies ahead will involve problems, of course, but none of these seem insurmountable, given a bit of time and goodwill, and none raise great philosophical issues. Above all, we can stop thinking of Armageddon. Then why does one detect a note of dissatisfaction, occasionally even of disquiet, among the professors and pun-

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dits? This brings me back, by way of conclusion, to Jean-Marie Le Pen.

* * *

Of all the questions raised in your letter, none strikes me as more important than this: how will the failure of communism affect radical criticism of existing democratic societies? The latter are not only self-questioning in their nature but also, as we are reminded by such gloomy prophets as Hayek and Popper, inherently self-destructive. And France, in this respect, is no exception. The democratic institutions that have gradually emerged and taken root here (prompting the historian François Furet to proclaim last year, on the occasion of the bicentenary, that the French Revolution was finally over) have been subjected to a constant crosssfire from both ends of the political spectrum – the far right consisting of elements that never accepted *la gueuse* (the Republic) in the first place, reinforced as time passed by a variety of other conservative forces, and the radical left which saw the bourgeois Republic as at best a prelude to the socialist or communist society of the future.

Now, of course, the French left is hardly in a position to engage in "radical criticism of existing democratic society." Officially in power, its ethos and sensibility still strongly present, perhaps dominant, in the media, the socialists and their allies are nevertheless, for reasons mostly domestic but not unrelated to what has happened in Eastern Europe, disoriented, divided, and (after the fiasco of their last national congress, fully displayed on television) conspicuously without an agreed program to offer the electorate – unless, precisely, it be the defense of the Republic against Jean-Marie Le Pen.

In other words, if Le Pen did not exist, it would be useful to invent him.

There are obvious problems with this prospect, not the least of which is that Le Pen, in sharp distinction to so many of his predecessors on the far right, does not profess to be against the Republic at all. On the contrary, he and his cohorts put their hands on their hearts and swear that their deepest concern is to save the constitutional order and traditional republican values – not to forget French culture, history, cuisine, and whatnot – from the hordes of North Africans and other foreigners that have in recent years, through negligence or evil design, been allowed to flood the country.

Now in point of fact the French have invested enormous effort over many generations in centralizing and unifying (first politically and then culturally) a country as diverse in its ethnic make-up as any in Europe. This has not gone without arousing and even nurturing a certain xenophobia, but it should not be confused with what we call racism, which also exists here, to be sure, but no more virulently than, for instance, in the United States. In deliberately choosing to do so, it seems to me, the anti-Le Pen forces are playing

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with fire. In any event, each new round of local and national elections seems to confirm first, that the National Front's following is no longer confined to the old far right, and second, that Le Pen's success is psychologically as well as statistically related to the striking decline in voter participation in recent contests, that is, he has managed to make himself the spokesman for the increasing numbers of voters who feel that neither the Socialists nor the opposition are willing or able to address their most urgent concerns: – the rise in criminality, for example, official corruption and the degradation of the educational system, all of which for one reason or another are linked in the public mind with immigration.

The immediate effect of all this, clearly, since Le Pen draws most of his votes from the conservative side of the electorate, is to make it easier for the Socialists to retain their grip on power.

Now, has all this anything to do with events in Eastern Europe? Not much, perhaps. Not necessarily. It depends on what the French want to make of it, after all; on whether, now that democracy is "winning" over there, they are prepared to give some thought on how to make it work over here. The Le Pen phenomenon will be of some use, in other words, if it reminds the so-called political class, Socialist and opposition alike, that precisely as they were celebrating the triumph of democracy in Eastern Europe they were losing touch with their own people at home. In reflecting on how this happened and what to do about it, French political thinkers will at the very least be obliged to deal, for once, not with general principles, however grand and stirring they may be, but with how democratic institutions actually work in the heterogeneous, consumer-oriented, media-influenced society that France – alas for our vanished youth, dear William! – has now become.

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Jorge Edwards

CHILEAN WRITING AFTER THE COUP

There is no direct and immediate relation between a country's political crises and the writing it produces. Chilean writers introduced the military coup of September 1973 into their work, but this does not mean that the nature of their writing was automatically changed by the occurrence of the coup. It was only after some years – years of silence, perplexity, self-questioning, dominating fear – that a new attitude on the part of poets, novelists, playwrights, and essayists, became apparent.

One could also look at the situation from the opposite direction, that is, from the experience of the past. Viewed from this angle and after the experience of the last years, it is easy to see that the writing of the sixties and even of the fifties reflected a rupture with certain traditional ways, that it was a result of the elements of disruption, profound contradiction and frustration already active in society. That is, the great changes in Chilean literature, rather than appearing as a consequence of recent historical events, instead preceded and announced those events. Accordingly, the writing of recent years is the outcome, sometimes surprising and exciting, of trends that began to appear in the fifties, like the writing on the wall of the biblical banquet, announcements expressed with extremely clear signs that nobody cared to see and of which no one interpreted the real meaning.

In fact, since colonial times, much of the best Chilean writing has been writing of anticipation, of announcement. In the eighteenth century the Jesuit priest Manuel de Lacunza wrote what has become a colonial classic, *Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty* (*La Venida del Mesías en Gloria y Majestad*). In the book, one reads about a rain of consecrated wafers, each with a tiny drop of blood in the center, falling over the convents, the patios, the muddy streets of the city of Santiago. Today, reading a book like this, we discover that our deep-rooted image of Santiago as a grayish, dull, monotonous place where nothing ever happens has always been an incomplete and extremely ambivalent notion. The city's calmness could at any time be shaken by geological, political, or even religious catastrophe. The gray city, baptized by its Spanish founders as Santiago of the New Extreme, has always held the hidden possibility of being turned overnight into a backdrop for the doings of the Apocalyptic Beast.

When the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro wrote *Ecuatorial* after World War One, he used the equator as an historial not a geographical metaphor.

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He was referring to a line that divides the end of the world, that separates a catastrophic ending from a new beginning. *Ecuatorial* is a poem of caravans, dethroned kings, magicians, multitudes who emigrate among ruins. As Enrico Santí has noted, Neruda's "poetics of prophecy" alludes to successive forms of Apocalypse: epic and political Apocalypse, the Apocalypse of Revolution and the founding of a new society, and the idea, which Neruda arrived at in his last years, of an Apocalypse of the mind.

Looking more closely at the last period of Neruda's poetry, it seems as if he began to mistrust the logic, the strict rationality, of his earlier notion of an apocalyptic revolution that would lay the foundations of the future. He saw the danger of an open clash between two conflicting rationalities, that of a social revolution and that of counterrevolution, the former seeking to accelerate historical time and the latter madly intent on freezing time and recovering the past. Neruda wrote, in the poem "La Verdad," ("The Truth"), which appears in his book of verse memoirs, *Memorial de Isla Negra* (*Black Island Memorial*):

> *No puedo más con la razón al hombro . . .*
> (So much for notional man and his burdens . . .)
> (tr. Ben Belitt)

The poem clearly refers to the burden of political reason, which he could no longer bear. In the same poem, Neruda alludes to the destructive quality of purely bilateral, black and white, Manichaean vision. He also observed in that poem:

> *amo lo que no tiene sin soeños.*
> *Tengo un jardín de flores que no existen*
> *Soy decididamente triangular . . .*
> (I love that which has only dreams
> I have a garden of flowers that doesn't exist
> I am decidedly triangular . . .)

Raúl Zurita noted that, paradoxically, La Moneda, the Chilean house of government, under Salvador Allende's triumph in 1970, absorbed something of the rhetoric of Neruda's "Canto General," while at the same time Chilean poets were already writing a completely different kind of poetry that rejected the solemnity of the epic tone, the notion of an epical Apocalypse. The new poetry employed colloquialism and irony and was influenced by the antipoetry of Nicano Parra. Yet it should be noted that Neruda himself at that time had already begun to critique his own former poetry. He died only two weeks after the military coup, whereas Parra continued to write his an-

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tipoetry during the dictatorial period, and it too changed revealingly. Neruda had recognized the danger of the Manichaean attitude and proclaimed himself "triangular," but the triangle is an image of perfection belonging to Euclidiean geometry. Parra went a step further and explored a possibility that Neruda himself had proclaimed in an early brief text, *Sobre una poesía sin pureza* (*About a Poetry without Purity*). I suspect that Parra, by profession a teacher of physics and mathematics, preferred to explore the fourth dimension.

Parra and Zurita, in spite of their different poetic styles, both employ a kind of mathemathical thinking to distance themselves from traditional logic, to challenge principles of identity and contradiction, and to discover, as an ultimate remedy against brutality and stupidity, a natural, nondogmatic, noninstitutional sense of worship. One poem from Parra's volume *Sermons and Homilies of the Christ of Elqui*, translated by Sandra Reyes, evokes the sensibility of these poets:

To sum it all up
to mistake a leaf for a leaf
to mistake a branch for a branch
to confuse a forest with a forest
is to be a fool
this is the quintessence of my doctrine
you're starting to get the hang of it, happily
things are becoming clear to you
now you can see that clouds are not clouds
rivers are not rivers
rocks are not rocks
they're altars!
columns!
domes!
it's time to say Mass.

Since the antipoetry of the fifties and sixties, and since the "artefactos," the brief and provocative epigrammatic texts of the late sixties and early seventies, there has been an important new current in Chilean writing. These writers have tried to undermine the solemn rhetoric of the old poetry, the arid programs of regionalist narratives, by using fantasy, humor, and creative memory that reinvents the past. Parra is one of the best examples of the new writing. He has employed the figure of the Christ of Elqui – the sort of mad preacher who in my generation could be found in downtown Santiago, standing on a bench of the Quinta Normal, with a long beard, worn mantle and flaming eyes, speaking in apocalpytic tones about the end of the world and condemning the ways of petty politicians – as a lyrical alter-ego. Such a

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mask has freed his poetic voice from a suffocating rationality, a dictatorial use of language. The poet Enrique Lihn invented a very different alter ego, Don Gerardo de Pompier, who was a turn-of-the-century decadent aesthete, a sort of Chilean Don Quixote always in violent and comical conflict with the barbarous doings of his own time. In his last years, Lihn was deeply concerned that the contamination of Chilean life by the manifestation of the military regime was a trap that reduced mental horizons and transformed Chileans into professionals of anti-Pinochetism, a dull full-time occupation. He wrote:

> I don't concern myself with the Dictator
> he in his own hospital, me in mine . . .

Every Chilean was sick, but to cultivate an obsessive, monothematic discourse was not the best escape.

When it was said in the past century that Chile was "the England of Souh America," it was also said that Chile was a country of historians, not of novelists or poets, because Chileans lacked the necessary imagination to write fiction or poetry. With the appearance of the great twentieth-century poets, Neruda, Gabriela Mistral, Vicente Huidobro, it was then said that we could produce great poetry but not novels, because nothing worth telling ever happened in Chile.

Now terrible things have happened, and poems, novels, dramas, essays, stories, and "artefactos" have appeared. I really don't know whether a country needs to suffer in order to produce creative writing. It seems at first glance to be a romantic theory. What I do think is that Chile's experience has led us to invention but also to reflection, to rereading, rewriting, paraphrasing and parody. We have been able to perceive more clearly the real unity of our literary tradition. The Christ of Elqui, that ghostly memoir of a city that became unreal, is a fictional ghost, although it has been used only in poetry. It could also perfectly fit into some of our recent novels, as is the case with Don Gerardo de Pompier, the character who rambles among the writings of Enrique Lihn.

From a distance of more than thirty years, it seems now that the new writing of the fifties, a turning away from regionalist writing and apparently indebted only to European and North American currents, was also a decisive assimilation of the writing of some of the great poets who preceded us. It brought to narrative prose the vision of Neruda's *Residencia en la tierra* (*Residence on Earth*) and Huidobro's *Altazor* and *Ecuatorial*, of Gabriela Mistral's *Tala* and of Rosamel del Valle's surrealism. It was a vision of decay, of time's erosion of things, "of false astrologies and somewhat lugubrious

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uses," as the verse goes; a vision pervaded by dominant anxiety and by the feeling that a period of history was ending. Paradoxically, the novelty of my generation's narrative was correlated with the use of the old, of the decayed, issuing in what one critic defined as a "literatura de la decrepitud."

One wonders today what was decaying, what was headed for its destruction, and where its origins lay. Was there a lost paradise in any given moment or place in our past? Or was this a generation that invented its own mythology? Again, it is a paradox that the new quality of this writing wasn't only that of an eroded, broken, dusty landscape. There was also a very significant shift in the point of view. Stories were now all being told directly or indirectly from a marginal, eccentrically subjective point of view: from the eyes of children or of very old people, of extravagant and self-destructive people, or of madmen. One finds correlations in the work of William Faulkner, one of the novelists we read most, or with Cervantes, the first modern writer in the Spanish language. What did this portend? In José Donoso's *Casa de campo* (*Country House*), written after the September 1973 coup (and conceived, as Donoso himself has said, the very same evening after watching the news on Spanish television), children, who had been central characters of our narrative prose in the fifties, were used by him in his novel as allegories for the frustrated Revolution. They share, in Donoso's metaphor, the same purity, illusions, playfulness, and folly as the Revolution. The grownups would soon come back to restore order and discipline, with the opportune help of uniformed *mayordomo*, the butler and the head servant of the house. . . .

The reader easily can imagine that the period of restored discipline, which properly and classically begins with a thorough cleaning out of the country house, would be also a period of severe punishment. And just so, a writer of the younger generation, Raúl Zurita, would become, through his first works, a poet of punishment. Zurita starts with a new reading of the past, and he takes up not only the Chilean past. He reads Dante anew, and attempts to rewrite the *Commedia*. But in the *Commedia*, Dante is only a visitor to the Inferno, under Virgil's guidance, while in Zurita's work the lyrical voice is neither in exile nor paying a visit, but is talking from inside a place. And as Zurita wants to maintain a degree of hope, his *Commedia* has no *Inferno*, and it begins with *Purgatorio*: a place of punishment, yet a place of redemption to come.

On reading this poetry, one feels that there will be salvation, and that salvation is related in a way to Chile's grandiose nature, a nature which is no longer that of Neruda's epic poetry but which represents instead a landscape of the mind. The mind in *Purgatorio* is ill, as the whole country is. Zurita's purgatory is the all-encompassing hospital in Enrique Lihn's last poems. And

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one dimly perceives that salvation will arrive only when logic and rationality pass through the "gates of excess" – gates of madness and excess more intellectual than erotic – to arrive in a green, fertile place:

"Have you seen those endless pastures stretching out?"

New writing in Chile is dominated by ideas of salvation and redemption, a redemption that takes one to the future while forcing a reexamination of the past. After reading my last book, *El Anfitrión* (*The Host*), a Chilean version of the old Faust legend, a transcription into the creole guitar of an operatic subject – to use an expression applied by Borges to the gaucho Faust of Estanislao del Campo – people were perplexed. They have asked me why the Devil, instead of buying the soul of my Faust, is interested only in buying his past and offers a deal to provide him with a different past, one specially adapted to today's realities. I don't pretend to give an answer here. But I want to demonstrate that all recent Chilean literature, and in a certain sense all of Chilean society, is obsessed with the past and the future and with the interplay between them: Original Sin, Purgatory, Paradise Before the Fall . . . In the writing of another young poet, Diego Maquieira, the lyrical voice is curiously ubiquitous. It is a voice hidden behind pillars, doors, the cloisters of colonial convents, or the offices of the Holy Inquisition; at the same time it is heard in noisy pubs where the atmosphere turns tense as the curfew arrives.

In Diamela Eltit's last novel, *El Cuarto mundo* (*The Fourth World*), we go back to our dark memories of prenatal, primordial waters and the confused collision of bodies. When those forms are born, thrown into the outside world, they are immediately sold, as everything else is in our flamboyant new capitalism.

In connection with this idea of the past, I think Marco Antonio de la Parra's description of the beginning of the new theater after the military coup is extraordinarily illuminating. A new play, *Brisca* (a popular game of cards), was written in about two hours and put on stage, after five or six days of rehearsal, at the Medical School of the University of Chile in Santiago.

Scenery was created with an old dirty curtain, two blackboards, a small table, three chairs, and a huge pistol on the table. A voice sings a popular song, announcing that the end of the world has finally arrived. The three actors are three obstetricians waiting for a woman in labor. It is soon revealed that the woman's labor pains have lasted for five hundred years, and that the three men are not really doctors. Nobody wants to do that kind of work anymore. The play's audience also learns that a popular singer has just been assassinated by Vietnamese terrorists. And one more important thing is

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obvious in the play: if you want to survive, you have to follow a strict prohibition against remembering things. There is a permanent vigilance over one's past. It is continually being examined and revised under the eye of the Chilean Big Brother. . . .

We can well imagine that our new creativity has emerged from those dirty curtains, those blackboards and chairs, in the midst of the shouts and wails of that woman in labor and the singing of that strange *bolero*. We have already gone down a long road and are convinced that the worst is over. In the process, we have learned a lot about our past writing and our history. In a certain way, we have contributed to the rescue of our writing from oblivion, but we have also invented it. It also can be read as a single text, a symphonic organism where each book, each fabric of work and of words, strikes its own unique and indispensable note. The obsessive divisiveness of literary genres, typical of the old criticism, has lost all meaning today. There was, one could say, a cultural tissue that was torn by violence, dictatorship, stupid censorship and hysterical intolerance. But this tissue has been slowly, patiently and vigorously rewoven. This means that we are finding a way out, with or without the help of Mephistopheles or Purgatory, and that we could meet soon in a place that is certainly not Paradise regained but is surely far from the Inferno.

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Christopher Middleton

THE FATE OF HAFSA'S POEMS

Arab chronicles record the names of more than thirty women poets in medieval Andalusia, but extant poems are attributed to only half as many. Why this disparity? Did the male scholars and poets who compiled anthologies tend to downplay women as poets, simply because they were women? Traditions might have planted a blind spot in their cultural consciousness: in their view, poems by women did nothing to nourish the root mythology of Arabic poetry, originally a male mythology of desert warriors, erogenous men and dangerous animals of the desert. A simpler reason might be that, in al-Andalus between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, poems were so much a part of everyday life that hundreds could have vanished without a trace, through carelessness with the familiar.

Among women of all classes there was an exceptionally high rate of literacy, especially in Cordova when the Umayyad dynasty (711-929 A.D.) was at its height. Even in later times, through all the sieges, massacres and famines, women seem to have lived breezier lives in Andalusia than in other regions of the medieval Muslim world. The orthodox factions (*faqi*) were largely misogynistic, true enough, and home was generally a woman's place. Yet in those multi-ethnic communities, as long as differences in gender and religion were not explosive issues, women could sing, improvise, and write poems just as they pleased.

It is hard to tell what values Arabo-Andalusians and Mozarabians assigned respectively to written (calligraphic) and to oral poetry. Possibly for literate people in those times the relation between script and voice was quite different from any that has come to be felt by us, who are captives of print. Certainly exuberant oral traditions filled their streets with song and invaded their palaces and gardens. Those traditions might have been the main stem of the racial memory, with poems in script a mere offshoot. Certainly, too, many poems written or recited, by men or women, for festive occasions, must have perished with the moments that called for them.

When poems by women were preserved in writing, they were usually fitted into a framework – anecdotal, biographical, or epistolary – many had been letter-poems in the first place. Thus Rumaykiyya, the slave girl who became the favorite and prolific wife of al-Mutamid, great poet-king of Seville in the second half of the eleventh century, is celebrated for the improvised couplet with which, in a garden, she first capitivated him. She is also known

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for the extravagance that her husband lavished on her, but did she write or improvise not a line worth keeping in al-Mutamid's brilliant court? Princess Wallada, again, figures for a breathless month or two as lover and correspondent of the young poet Ibn Zaydun (1003-70), and then quite soon she is gone.

As for Hafsa Bint Al-Hajj Ar-Rakuntyya (1135-91), whose erudition and beauty were legendary in Granada, her poems were preserved out of piety toward someone else: the family of her lover, the poet Abu Ja'far Ahmad ibn Sa'id, who was crucified in Malaga in 1163, kept her manuscripts together with his. Later the chronicler al-Maqqari threaded some of her poems together with a tinsel of conjecture and hearsay.

Did Hafsa renounce poetry at the age of twenty-eight because of Abu Ja'far's horrible death? All we know is that nothing survives of what she might have written during the second half of her life, some of which she spent in safe hands as a tutor to the royal princesses in Marrakesh, where she died.

The translations that follow are indirect; they are from Spanish versions. All of the originals are in classical Arabic verse, metrical and rhymed. The commentary with which we introduce Hafsa includes but abridges that of al-Maqqari for poems 5 and 6 and two relevant poems by Abu Ja'far. Poems 8 through 17 speak for themselves; Hafsa in love announces, through a veil of conventional phrasing, the pulse and presence of a universe, but her real cry of grief is heart-rending still.

* * *

While still quite young, Hafsa wrote the following poem for a lady who asked for evidence of her skill in versification and calligraphy. The poem is as discreet and self-reflexive as Hafsa herself seems to have been:

(1)
Highborn beautiful lady,
do not look too close when you see,
who are kindness itself,
the lines traces by this pen of mine,
but look upon them with love
passing over the faults
in content and in calligraphy

When she was about twenty-three (1158-9) Hafsa travelled to Rabat in Morocco with a company of nobles and poets. There, at the court of Caliph Abd al-Mu'min, she wrote to the great man this miniature supplication:

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(2)
O lord over men
in whose gifts we trust
grant me a sheet of paper
that will shield me against fate
whereon your hand may write
"To the One God Be Praise"

The Caliph's "sheet of paper" was the deed to a property near Granada (Rakuna). Probably it came with a patent of nobility. But already a quite particular "fate" was unfolding. Two years before the journey to Rabat, the son of the Caliph had arrived in Granada as the new governor. Two years before his arrival, Hafsa had begun at the age of nineteen (1154) her celebrated love affair with the poet Abu Ja'far Ahmad ibn Abd al-Malik ibn Sa'id. For the new governor, a very young man and dark-skinned (as Abu Ja'far needlingly reminded her), Hafsa wrote the following formal poem:

(3)
O noble son of the Caliph,
of the most excellent *imam*,
a festival to celebrate yourself
brings what you desire.
She whom you love comes to visit you,
combining ceremony with satisfaction,
and to recapture
pleasures lost and past.

Perhaps this poem and the next were written after 1162, for to Abu Ja'far she writes:

(4)
You come first, but enemies,
unjust men who know more and more,
continually say that you do not.
He who has power over other men of his time –
seekers of glory who stop at nothing –
can he be ignored?

Hafsa is justifying her interest in the governor, whose full name is Abu Sa'id 'Utman ibn 'Abd al-Mu'min. But Abu Ja'far, though a gallant himself, must have been jealous. To make matters worse, he was 'Utman's secretary, privy-councilor to him. The two poems epitomize a dangerous scene.

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The Almohade governor, 'Utman, still young, his position fragile; Abu Ja'far resenting him for reasons political and personal; Hafsa trying to protect Abu Ja'far, while cultivating 'Utman for whatever allures (charm, power, liberality) she might have divined in him. In 1162 there is a crisis: the Almohade power in Granada is overthrown for a few months by rebel forces led by Ibn Mardanis. The crisis over and Almohade authority restored, Abu Ja'far's father, who had opposed the Almohades (and whose brother had been governor of Granada under the previous Almoravide régime) is duly thrown into prison. During the coup, Abu Ja'far himself would have gone over to the rebels, even if only out of family loyalty. The restoration of Almohade power now gives 'Utman his chance.

* * *

Al-Maqqari's commentary frames the next four poems. The first is one which Abu Ja'far sent to Hafsa by messenger:

Lady, whose name I keep to myself,
And to whom I gladly allude, but no more,
I do not see you keeping your promise.
I fear that the end of my life is approaching,
Yet I do not expect you to remain mine till the crack of doom.
If only you would see me when the shadow of night falls.
When doves go to rest I cry out with love and longing.
I want you with a love that prolongs desire,
Desire for a woman full of pride,
Who does not reply to my greeting.
If you will not grant me your favors,
Then let me rest,
Else my despair will break the bonds between us.

Hafsa detained Abu Ja'far's messenger and wrote a reply for him to take back. Discreet as ever, she told the messenger: "I have no idea why I bother with you two rascals." Her words were conveyed to Abu Ja'far, who asked the messenger what other news he brought. The messenger (probably bluffed by Hafsa's ostensibly dismissive remark) replied, "The news of one who took a message from a rascal to a wordy woman: read the verses and you'll see."

(5)

You who claim to be the best of lovers,
First in passion when it comes to women,
Your poem has reached me,
But I am not satisfied with your words.
You say that you are desperate for love,

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And that your despair will break the bonds between us.
It's a big mistake you are making,
There's no need for all your noble talk.
Ever since you joined the chase,
You have been leading the pack.
But now you stumble
And are ashamed to be feeling the strain.
For the love of God, at all times
The clouds do show their rain
And orange blossoms open their corollas.
If you understood my reasoning,
You would not reproach me at all.

Abu Ja'far read the verses, pondered, then exclaimed, "What fools we are! She alludes to a pavilion in my gardens, let's go!" And sure enough, not long after they arrived at the pavilion, Hafsa appeared. Abu Ja'far began to reproach her, but she only spoke another poem:

(6)
When we wine and dine,
Don't throw me the book.
Let me off your hook
And I'll let you off mine.

While Abu Ja'far and Hafsa were amiably conversing, a note was brought to them from al-Kutandi (a poet and one of Abu Ja'far's cronies):

O, Abu Ja'far, son of illustrious noblefolk,
Alone with your beloved in spite of envious men,
Don't you want to see your friend,
Who is sober, modest, and discreet,
And who knows how to keep your hideous secret?
When a lover is with his beloved he spends the night
Given over to pleasures with five girls.

Abu Ja'far wrote an outraged reply on the back of al-Kutandi's poem:

If you ever show your face here,
I'll tell you what your crime is.
Would it entertain you to settle yourself
Between my love and me?
If so, what can it be that you want
Except to make me die the sooner?
Well, death, after a long delay,

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Has paid his debts to me:
If you come here I'll take you to pieces
With both hands.
Or do you only want to be
The bird that proclaims
It is time for us to part?
Pass the night with five girls, if you so choose,
Committing all kinds of indecencies,
But you deserve to be quite alone
With the sun and the moon.

This poem was carried back to al-Kutandi, who, when the messenger arrived, had just fallen into a cesspit. Everybody was laughing at him. He told the messenger: "Let them know what happened." Hafsa and Abu Ja'far had a good laugh, too, when they heard about this. Then they wrote to al-Kutandi a poem in the *alímon* manner (writing alternate lines):

We have been freed from that poet
By someone falling in the shit:
Go back to your pit, son of shit,
No matter who might have made it.
And if you come back to see us one day,
Most vile and despicable of men, you'll see
That such is the luck in store for you
If you stroll around with your head in the air.
You fuddyduddy, shit-lover, amber-hater,
May God prevent you from having visitors
Until they come to bury you!

(Here we leave al-Maqqari.)

* * *

To none of the following poems (first Abu Ja'far's, then poems 7 through 16) can we assign exact dates within the political scene suggested by poems 3 and 4 and by Abu Ja'far's "Lady, whose name. . . . " All together, however, indicate a convergence of interests that are by no means ghostly. Passion and politics are set on a collision course.

Abu Ja'far writes to Hafsa about a night in the park called Hawr Mu'Ammal:

May God watch over a night spent without anyone watching,
A night which hid us in the Hawr Mu'Ammal.
From Nayd an aroma was wafted over,
Shivering with the scent of carnations.
A turtle dove was cooing in the trees.

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Myrtle branches stooped over the stream.
And the garden was as if delighted
By what was present: embraces, kisses, caresses.

Hafsa replies with a counterpoem:

(7)
By your life! The garden was not glad because we met.
Rather it showed us rancor and envy.
The river did not clap its hands to have us close,
And the dove sang of its aches and pains.
You're not thinking straight for once:
Everywhere those people are up to no good.
I think the sky showed us its stars
Only to spy on us.

The order in which poems 8-15 were written is not known, but 16 and 17 can be assumed to be the last two. Hafsa's phrasing remains conventional enough. Her own voice, however, her pulse, the urgency of her feelings become increasingly poignant as the political situation worsens. She would also have known in advance of the dangers besetting Abu Ja'far's entire family: his brother, Abd al-Rahman, actually joined Ibn Mardanis after the revolt had been put down, but was captured, imprisoned for a time, then executed.

(8)
Those lips I praise because I know
What I am saying, what I mean.
I do them justice, tell no lies.
From them I'm drunk and what I drank
Tasted better than any wine.

(9)
Come and see my verses
Be thrilled by their pearls
Which will adorn your ears
It is the way a garden
Cannot go to you
But sends you its perfume.

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(10)
I am sending my message:
It opens the cups of the flowers
And makes the doves speak in the trees
As it goes to a distant friend who dwells
In my very body
Although my eyes have no sight of him.
Do not think that absence makes me forget you.
God, that will never happen.

(11)
If he were not a star,
Eyes that enjoyed his glow,
Would shadow shroud them so,
Now he is far?
Salud! from one who's sad,
Yet may it still address
Virtues and powers above,
Which as they onward move
Took from me all I had
Of fortune, happiness.

(12)
In the still of the night
Ask the cloud with its beating heart
If it has spent the night with my love, remembering me:
Ay, it has given my heart
Its beat and, heavens above,
Given the lids of my eyes this rain
That pours down my cheeks.

(13)
Shall I come to you or will it be my place?
My heart always gives in to your desire.
You will be safe from the sun's heat,
And you will not be thirsty
When you make me welcome:
My lips are water sweet and fresh,
And the branches of my braids give deep shade.
Answer me now: you'll be doing her no favor, Yamil*
If you do what your Butayna is waiting for.

---

*Note: the names allude to the classical Arabic *'udri* ("Platonic") poet Yamil and his

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(14)

The throat of a gazelle has come to visit you
Under the black of its hair the moon appears
Its eyes took shape when Babylon was enchanted
Its saliva surpasses wine
Its cheeks put roses to shame
Its teeth have eclipsed pearls

(15)

O you who used to be the most sensitive of men
Before fate lifted you up to let you fall
In love with a black woman
Who is altogether like the night, which hides beauty
And with darkness obscures the radiance of a face,
Nor in that night can any blond thing be seen,
Tell me, you being so well acquainted
With connoisseurs of extrinsic beauty,
By God, would anyone ever fall in love with a garden
Where no roses are, nor blossoms of the orange tree?

(16)

I will keep you jealously
where no spies can see you
And from yourself, your time
and from the place you live
And though till the crack of doom
I hide you in my eyes
Still it will not be enough for me.

(17)

They threaten me because I wear mourning
For a lover of mine they put to death.
God have mercy on anyone who is liberal with tears
Weeping for a man slaughtered by his rivals,
And may the clouds of the afternoon,
With such generosity as was his,
Water the earth wherever she may go.

---

beloved – exemplars of spiritual love.

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Joyce Carol Oates

THE HAIR

The couples fell in love but not at the same time, and not evenly.

There was perceived to be, from the start, an imbalance of power. The less dominant couple, the Carsons, feared social disadvantage. They feared being hopeful of a friendship that would dissolve before consummation. They feared seeming eager.

Said Charlotte Carson, hanging up the phone, "The Riegels have invited us for dinner on New Year's," her voice level, revealing none of the childlike exultation she felt, nor did she look up to see the expression on her husband's face as he murmured, "Who? The Riegels?" pausing before adding, " – That's very nice of them."

Once or twice, the Carsons had invited the Riegels to their home but for one or another reason the Riegels had declined the invitation.

New Year's Eve went well indeed and shortly thereafter – though not too shortly – Charlotte Carson telephoned to invite the Riegels back.

The friendship between the couples blossomed. In a relatively small community like the one in which the couples lived, such a new, quick, galloping sort of alliance cannot go unnoticed.

So it was noted by mutual friends who felt some surprise, and perhaps some envy. For the Riegels were a golden couple, newcomers to the area who, not employed locally, had about them the glamor of temporary visitors.

In high school, Charlotte Carson thought with a stab of satisfaction, the Riegels would have snubbed me.

Old friends and acquaintances of the Carsons began to observe that Charlotte and Barry were often busy on Saturday evenings, their calendar seemingly marked for weeks in advance. And when a date did not appear to be explicitly set Charlotte would so clearly – insultingly – hesitate, not wanting to surrender a prime weekend evening only to discover belatedly that the Riegels would call them at the last minute and ask them over. Charlotte Carson, gentlest, most tactful of women, in her mid-thirties, shy at times as a schoolgirl of another era, was forced repeatedly to say "I'm sorry – I'm afraid we can't." And insincerely.

Paul Riegel, whose name everyone knew, was in his early forties: he was a travel writer, he had adventures of a public sort. He published articles and books, he was often to be seen on television, he was tall, handsome, tanned, gregarious, his graying hair springy at the sides of his head and re-

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treating rather wistfully at the crown of his head. "Your husband seems to bear the gift of happiness," Charlotte Carson told Ceci Riegel. Charlotte sometimes spoke too emotionally and wondered now if she had too clearly exposed her heart. But Ceci simply smiled one of her mysterious smiles. "Yes. He tries."

In any social gathering the Riegels were likely to be, without visible effort, the cynosure of attention. When Paul Riegel strode into a crowded room wearing one of his bright ties, or his familiar sports-coat-sports-shirt-open-collar with well-laundered jeans, people looked immediately to him and smiled. There's Paul Riegel! He bore his minor celebrity with grace and even a kind of aristocratic humility, shrugging off questions in pursuit of the public side of his life. If, from time to time, having had a few drinks, he told wildly amusing exaggerated tales, even, riskily, outrageous ethnic or dialect jokes, he told them with such zest and childlike self-delight his listeners were convulsed with laughter.

Never, or almost never, did he forget names.

And his wife Ceci – petite, ash-blond, impeccably dressed, with a delicate classically proportioned face like an old-fashioned cameo – was surely his ideal mate. She was inclined at times to be fey but she was really very smart. She had a lovely whitely glistening smile as dazzling as her husband's and as seemingly sincere. For years she had been an interior designer in New York City and since moving to the country was a consultant to her former firm; it was rumored that her family "had money" and that she had either inherited a small fortune or spurned a small fortune at about the time of her marriage to Paul Riegel.

It was rumored too that the Riegels ran through people quickly, used up friends. That they had affairs.

Or perhaps it was only Paul who had affairs.

Or Ceci.

Imperceptibly, it seemed, the Carsons and the Riegels passed from being friendly acquaintances who saw each other once or twice a month to being friends who saw each other each week, or more. There were formal dinners, and there were cocktail parties, and there were Sunday brunches – the social staples of suburban life. There were newly acquired favorite restaurants to patronize and, under Ceci's guidance, outings to New York City to see plays, ballet, opera. There were even picnics from which bicycle rides and canoe excursions were launched – not without comical misadventures. In August when the Riegels rented a house on Nantucket Island they invited the Carsons to visit; when the Riegels had house guests the Carsons were almost always invited to meet them; soon the men were playing squash together on a regular basis. (Paul won three games out of five, which

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seemed just right. But he did not win easily.) In time Charlotte Carson overcame her shyness about telephoning Ceci as if on the spur of the moment – "Just to say hello!"

Ceci Riegel had no such scruples, nor did Paul, who thought nothing of telephoning friends – everywhere in the world: he knew so many people – at virtually any time of the day or night, simply to say hello.

The confidence born of never having been rejected.

Late one evening the Carsons were delighted to hear from Paul in Bangkok, of all places – where he was on assignment with a Life photographer.

Another time, sounding dazed and not quite himself, he telephoned them at 7:30 A.M. from John F. Kennedy Airport, newly arrived in the States and homesick for the sound of "familiar" voices. He hadn't been able to get hold of Ceci, he complained, but they were next on his list.

Which was enormously flattering.

Sometimes when Paul was away on one of his extended trips Ceci was, as she said, morbidly lonely, so the three of them went out for Chinese food and a movie, or watched videos late into the night; or, impulsively, rather recklessly, Ceci got on the phone and invited a dozen friends over, and neighbors too, though always, first, Charlotte and Barry – "Just to feel I *exist*."

Barry had not had a male friend whom he saw so regularly since college and the nature of his work – he was an executive with Bell Labs – seemed to preclude camaraderie. Charlotte was his closest friend but he rarely confided in her all that was in his heart: this wasn't his nature.

Unlike his friend Paul he preferred the ragged edges of gatherings not their quicksilver centers. He was big-boned with heavy-lidded quizzical eyes, a shadowy beard like shot deep in the pores of his skin, wide nostrils, a handsome sensual mouth. He'd been an all-A student once and carried still that air of tension and precariousness strung tight as a bow. Did he take himself too seriously? Or not seriously enough? Wild moods swung in him, rarely surfacing. When his wife asked him why was he so quiet, what was he thinking, he replied smiling, "Nothing important, honey," though resenting the question, the intrusion. The implied assertion *I have a right to your secrets.*

His heart pained him when Ceci Riegel greeted him with a hearty little spasm of an embrace and a perfumy kiss alongside his cheek but he was not the kind of man to fall sentimentally in love with a friend's wife. Nor was he the kind of man, aged forty and wondering when his life would begin, to fall in love with his friend.

The men played squash daily when Paul was in town. Sometimes, afterward, they had lunch together, and a few beers, and talked about their

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families; their fathers, mainly. Barry drifted back to his office pale and shaken and that evening might complain vaguely to Charlotte that Paul Riegel came on a little too strong for him: "As if it's always the squash court, and he's always the star."

Charlotte said quickly, "He means well. And so does Ceci. But they're aggressive people." She paused, wondering what she was saying. " – Not like us."

When Barry and Paul played doubles with other friends, other men, they nearly always won. Which pleased Barry more than he would have wished anyone to know.

And Paul's praise: it burned in his heart with a luminosity that endured for hours and days and all in secret.

The Carsons were childless but had two cats. The Riegels were childless but had a red setter bitch, no longer young.

The Carsons lived in a small mock-Georgian house in town, the Riegels lived in a glass, stone, and redwood house, custom-designed, three miles out in the country. The Carsons' house was one of many attractive houses of its kind in their quiet residential neighborhood and had no distinctive features except an aged enormous plane tree in the front which would probably have to be dismantled soon – "It will break our hearts," Charlotte said. The Carsons' house was fully exposed to the street; the Riegels' house was hidden from the narrow gravel road that ran past it by a seemingly intended meadow of juniper pines, weeping willows, grasses, wild flowers.

Early on in their friendship, a tall cool summer drink in hand, Barry Carson almost walked through a plate glass door at the Riegels' – beyond it was the redwood deck, Ceci in a silk floral-printed dress with numberless pleats.

Ceci was happy and buoyant and confident always. For a petite woman – size five, it was more than once announced – she had a shapely body, breasts, hips, strong-calved legs. When she and Charlotte Carson played tennis Ceci was all over the court, laughing and exclaiming, while slow-moving premeditated Charlotte, poor Charlotte who felt, in her friend's company, ostrich-tall and ungainly, missed all but the easy shots. "You need to be more aggressive, Char!" Paul Riegel called out. " – Need to be *murderous*!"

The late-night drive back to town from the Riegels' along narrow twisty country roads Barry behind the wheel sleepy with drink yet excited too, vaguely sweetly aching, Charlotte yawning and sighing, and there was the danger of white-tailed deer so plentiful in this part of the state leaping in front of the car, but they returned home safely, suddenly they were home, and, inside, one would observe that their house was so lacking in imagination,

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wasn't it? So exposed to the neighbors? "Yes but you wanted this house." "No you were the one who wanted this house." "Not *this* house – but this was the most feasible." Though sometimes one would observe that the Riegels' house had flaws: so much glass and it's drafty in the winter, so many queer elevated decks and flights of stairs, wall-less rooms, sparsely furnished rooms like designers' showcases and the cool chaste neutral colors that Ceci evidently favored – "It's beautiful yes but a bit sterile."

In bed exhausted they would drift to sleep separately wandering the corridors of an unknown building opening one door after another in dread and fascination. Charlotte who should not have had more than two or three glasses of wine – but it was an anniversary of the Riegels': they'd uncorked bottles of champagne – slept fitfully, waking often dry-mouthed and frightened not knowing where she was. A flood of hypnagogic images raced in her brain, the faces of strangers never before glimpsed by her thrummed beneath her eyelids. In that state of consciousness that is neither sleep nor waking Charlotte had the volition to will, ah how passionately, how despairingly, that Paul Riegel would comfort her: slip his arm around her shoulders, nudge his jaw against her cheek, whisper in her ear as he'd done once or twice that evening in play but now in seriousness. Beside her someone stirred and groaned in his sleep and kicked at the covers.

Paul Riegel entranced listeners with lurid tales of starving Cambodian refugees, starving Ethiopian children, starving Mexican beggars. His eyes shone with angry tears one moment and with mischief the next for he could not resist mocking his own sobriety. The laughter he aroused at such times had an air of bafflement, shock.

Ceci came to him to slip an arm through his as if to comfort or to quiet and there were times when quite perceptibly Paul shook off her arm, stepped away, stared down at her with a look as if he'd never seen the woman before.

When the Carsons did not see or hear from the Riegels for several days their loneliness was almost palpable: a thickness in the chest, a density of being, to which either might allude knowing the other would immediately understand. If the Riegels were actually away that made the separation oddly more bearable than if they were in fact here in their house amid the trees but not seeing the Carsons that weekend or mysteriously incommunicado with their telephone answering tape switched on. When Charlotte called, got the tape, heard the familiar static-y overture then Paul Riegel's cool almost hostile voice that did not identify itself but merely stated *no one is here right now, should you like to leave a message please wait for the sound of the bleep,* she felt a loss too profound to be named and often hung up in silence.

For it had happened as the Carsons feared – the Riegels were domi-

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nant. So fully in control.

For there was the terrible period, several months in all, when for no reason the Carsons could discover – and they discussed the subject endlessly, obsessively – the Riegels seemed to have little time for them. Or saw them with batches of others in which their particular friendship could not be readily discerned. Paul was a man of quick enthusiasms, and Ceci was a woman of abrupt shifts of allegiance, thus there was logic of sorts to their cruelty in elevating for a while a new couple in the area who were both theoretical mathematicians, and a neighbor's house guest who'd known Paul in college and was now in the diplomatic service, and a cousin of Ceci's, a male model in his late twenties who was staying with the Riegels for weeks and weeks and weeks taking up every spare minute of their time it seemed so when Charlotte baffled and hurt called, Ceci murmured in an undertone, "I can't talk now, can I call you back in the morning?" and failed to call for days, days, days.

One night when Charlotte would have thought Barry was asleep he shocked her by saying, "I never liked her, much. Hot shit little Ceci." She had never heard her husband utter such words before and did not know how to reply.

They went away on a trip. Three weeks in the Caribbean and only in the third week did Charlotte scribble a postcard for the Riegels – quick scribbled little note as if one of many.

One night she said, "*He's* the dangerous one. He always tries to get people to drink too much, to keep him company."

They came back, and not long afterward Ceci called, and the friendship was resumed precisely as it had been. The same breathless pace, the same dazzling intensity, though now Paul had a new book coming out and there were parties in the city, book signings at book stores, an interview on a morning news program. The Carsons gave a party for him inviting virtually everyone they knew locally and the party was a great success and in a corner of the house Paul Riegel hugged Charlotte Carson so hard she laughed protesting her ribs would crack but when she drew back to look at her friend's face she saw it was damp with tears.

Later, Paul told a joke about Reverend Jesse Jackson that was a masterpiece of mimicry though possibly in questionable taste. In the general hilarity no one noticed, or at least objected. In any case there were no blacks present.

The Riegels were childless but would not have defined their condition in those terms – as a lack, a loss, a negative. Before marrying they had discussed the subject of children thoroughly, Paul said, and came to the conclusion no.

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The Carsons too were childless but would perhaps have defined their condition in those terms, in weak moods at least. Hearing Paul speak so indifferently of children the Carsons exchanged a glance almost of embarrassment.

Each hoped the other would not disclose any intimacy.

Ceci sipped at her drink and said, "I'd have been willing."

Paul said, "*I* wouldn't."

There was a brief nervous pause. The couples were sitting on the Riegels' redwood deck in the gathering dusk.

Paul then astonished the Carsons by speaking in a bitter impassioned voice of families, children, parents, the "politics" of intimacy. In any intimate group, he said, the struggle to be independent, to define oneself as an individual, is so fierce it creates terrible waves of tension; a field of psychic warfare. He'd endured it as a child and young adolescent in his parents' home and as an adult he didn't think he could bear to bring up a child – "especially a son" – knowing of the doubleness and secrecy of the child's life.

"There is the group life which is presumably open and observable," he said, " – and there is the secret inner real life no one can penetrate." He spoke with such uncharacteristic vehemence that neither of the Carsons would have dared to challenge him or even to question him in the usual conversational vein.

Ceci sat silent, drink in hand, staring impassively out into the shadows.

After a while conversation resumed again and they spoke softly, laughed softly. The handsome white wrought iron furniture in which they were sitting took on an eerie solidity even as the human figures seemed to fade; losing outline and contour; blending into the night and into one another.

Charlotte Carson lifted her hand registering a small chill spasm of fear that she was dissolving but it was only a drunken notion of course.

For days afterward Paul Riegel's disquieting words echoed in her head. She tasted something black and her heart beat in anger like a cheated child's. *Don't you love me then? Don't any of us love any of us?* To Barry she said, "That was certainly an awkward moment wasn't it – when Paul started his monologue about family life, intimacy, all that. What did you make of it?"

Barry murmured something evasive and backed off.

The Carsons owned two beautiful Siamese cats, neutered male and neutered female, and the Riegels owned a skittish Irish setter named Poppy. When the Riegels came to visit Ceci always made a fuss over one or the other of the cats insisting it sit in her lap, sometimes even at the dinner table where she'd feed it on the sly. When the Carsons came to visit the damned dog as Barry spoke of it went into a frenzy of barking and greeted them at the front door as if it had never seen them before – "Nice dog! Good dog!

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Sweet Poppy!" the Carsons would cry in unison.

The setter was rheumy-eyed and thick-bodied and arthritic. If every year of a dog's age is approximately seven years in human terms poor Poppy was almost eighty years old. She managed to shuffle to the front door to bark at visitors but then lacked the strength or motor coordination to reverse herself and return to the interior of the house so Paul had to carry her, one arm under her bony chest and forelegs, the other firmly under her hindquarters, an expression of vexed tenderness in his face.

Dryly he said, "I hope someone will do as much for me someday."

One rainy May afternoon when Paul was in Berlin and Barry was in Virginia visiting his family Ceci impulsively invited Charlotte to come for a drink and meet her friend Nils Larson – or was the name Lasson – Lawson? – an old old dear friend. Nils was short, squat-bodied, energetic, with a gnomish head and bright malicious eyes; linked to Ceci, it appeared, in a way that allowed him to be both slavish and condescending. He was a "theater person" – his bubbly talk was studded with names of the famous and near-famous. Never once did he mention Paul Riegel's name though certain of his mannerisms– head thrown back in laughter, hands gesticulating as he spoke – reminded Charlotte of certain of Paul's mannerisms. The man was Paul's elder by perhaps a decade.

Charlotte stayed only an hour, then made her excuses and slipped away. She had seen Ceci's friend draw his pudgy forefinger across the nape of Ceci's neck in a gesture that signaled intimacy or the arrogant pretense of intimacy and the sight offended her. But she never told Barry and resolved not to think of it and of whether Nils spent the night at the Riegels' and whether Paul knew anything of him or of the visit. Nor did Ceci ask Charlotte what she had thought of Nils Larson – Lasson – Lawson? – the next time the women spoke.

Barry returned from Virginia with droll tales of family squabbling. His brother and his sister-in-law, their children, the network of aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, grandparents, ailing elderly relatives whose savings were being eaten up – invariably the expression was "eaten up" – by hospital and nursing home expenses. Barry's father, severely crippled from a stroke, was himself in a nursing home from which he would never be discharged, and all his conversation turned upon this fact which others systematically denied; including, in the exigency of the moment, Barry. He had not, he said, really recognized his father. It was as if another man – aged, shrunken, querulous, sly – had taken his place.

The elderly Mr. Carson had affixed to a wall of his room a small white card on which he'd written some Greek symbols, an inscription he claimed to have treasured all his life. Barry asked what the Greek meant and was told:

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When my ship sank, the others sailed on.

Paul Riegel returned from Berlin exhausted and depressed despite the fact, a happy one to his wife and friends, that a book of his was on the paperback best-seller list published by *The New York Times*. When Charlotte Carson suggested with uncharacteristic gaiety that they celebrate, Paul looked at her with a mild quizzical smile and asked, "Why, exactly?"

The men played squash, the women played tennis.

The Carsons had other friends of course. Older and more reliable friends. They did not need the Riegels. Except they were in love with the Riegels.

Did the Riegels love them? Ceci telephoned one evening and Barry happened to answer and they talked together for an hour and afterward, when Charlotte asked Barry what they'd talked about, careful to keep all signs of jealousy and excitement out of her voice, Barry said evasively, " – A friend of theirs is dying. Of AIDS. Ceci says he weighs only ninety pounds and has withdrawn from everyone – 'slunk off to die like a sick animal.' And that Paul doesn't care. Or won't talk about it." Barry paused, aware that Charlotte was looking at him closely. A light film of perspiration covered his face; his nostrils appeared unusually dark, dilated. "He's no one we know, honey. The dying man I mean."

When Paul Riegel emerged from a sustained bout of writing the first people he wanted to see were the Carsons of course so the couples went out for Chinese food – "a banquet, no less!" – at their favorite Chinese restaurant in a shopping mall. The Dragon Inn had no liquor license so they brought bottles of wine and six-packs of beer. They were the last customers to leave and by the end waiters and kitchen help were standing around or prowling restlessly at the rear of the restaurant. There was a minor disagreement over the check which Paul Riegel insisted had not been added up "strictly correctly." He and the manager discussed the problem and since the others were within earshot he couldn't resist clowning for their amusement; slipping into a comical Chinese (unless it was Japanese?) accent. In the parking lot the couples laughed helplessly gasping for breath and bent double and in the car driving home – Barry drove: they'd taken the Carsons' Honda Accord, and Barry was seemingly the most sober of the four of them – they kept bursting into peals of laughter like naughty children.

They never returned to the Dragon Inn.

The men played squash together but their most rewarding games were doubles in which they played, and routed, another pair of men.

As if grudgingly Paul Riegel would tell Barry Carson he was a "damned good player." To Charlotte he would say, "Your husband is a damned good player but if only he could be a bit more *murderous* – !"

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Barry Carson's handsome heavy face darkened with pleasure when he heard such praise, exaggerated as it was. Though afterward, regarding himself in a mirror, he felt shame: he was forty-two years old, he had a very good job in a highly competitive field, he had a very good marriage with a woman he both loved and respected, he believed he was leading, on the whole, a very good life, yet none of this meant as much to him as Paul Riegel carelessly complimenting him on his squash game.

How has my life come to this?

Poppy developed cataracts on both eyes. And then tumorous growths in her neck. The Riegels took her to the vet and had her put to sleep and Ceci had what was reported to the Carsons as a breakdown of a kind: wept and wept and wept. Paul too was shaken by the ordeal but managed to joke over the phone about the dog's ashes. When Charlotte told Barry of the dog's death she saw Barry's eyes narrow as he resisted saying Thank God! and said instead, gravely, as if it would be a problem of his own, "Poor Ceci will be inconsolable."

For weeks it wasn't clear to the Carsons that they would be invited to visit the Riegels on Nantucket then, shortly before the Riegels left, Ceci said as if casually, " – We did set a date didn't we? For you two to come visit?"

On their way up – it was a seven-hour drive to the ferry at Woods Hole – Charlotte said to Barry, "Promise you won't drink so much this year." Offended, Barry said, "I won't monitor your behavior, honey, if you won't monitor mine."

From the first, the Nantucket visit went awkwardly. Paul wasn't home and his whereabouts weren't explained though Ceci chattered brightly and effusively carrying her drink with her as she escorted the Carsons to their room and watched them unpack. Her shoulder-length hair was graying and disheveled; her face was heavily made up, especially about the eyes. Several times she said, "Paul will be so happy to see you," as if Paul had not known they were invited; or, knowing, like Ceci herself, had perhaps forgotten. An east wind fanned drizzle and soft gray mist against the windows.

Paul returned looking fit and tanned and startled about the eyes: in his walnut-brown face the whites glared. Toward dusk the sky lightened and the couples sat on the beach with their drinks. Ceci continued to chatter while Paul smiled vague and distracted looking out at the surf. The air was chilly and damp but wonderfully fresh. The Carsons drew deep breaths and spoke admiringly of the view. And the house. And the location. They were wondering had the Riegels been quarreling? was something wrong? had they themselves come on the wrong day, or at the wrong time? Paul had been effusive too in his greetings but had not seemed to see them and had scarcely

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looked at them since.

Before they sat down to dinner the telephone began to ring. Ceci in the kitchen (with Charlotte who was helping her) and Paul in the living room (with Barry: the men were watching a televised tennis tournament) made no move to answer it. The ringing continued for what seemed like a long time then stopped and resumed again while they were having dinner and again neither of the Riegels made a move to answer it. Paul grinned running both hands roughly through the bushy patches of hair at the sides of his head and said, "When the world beats a path to your doorstep beat it back, friends! *Beat it back for fuck's sake!*"

His extravagant words were meant to be funny of course but would have required another atmosphere altogether to be so. As it was, the Carsons could only stare and smile in embarrassment.

Ceci filled the silence by saying loudly, "Life's little ironies! – you spend a lifetime making yourself famous then you try to back off and dismantle it. But it won't dismantle! It's a mummy and you're inside it!"

" – not *in* a mummy," Paul said, staring smiling at the lobster on his plate which he'd barely eaten, " – you are a mummy." He had been drinking steadily, Scotch on the rocks, and now wine, since arriving home.

Ceci laughed sharply. " 'In,' 'are,' what's the difference?" she said, appealing to the Carsons. She reached out to squeeze Barry's hand, hard. "In any case you're a goner, right?"

Paul said, "No – *you're* a goner."

The evening continued in this vein. The Carsons sent despairing glances at each other.

The telephone began to ring and this time Paul rose to answer it. He walked stiffly, and took his glass of wine with him. He took the call not in the kitchen but in another room at the rear of the house and he was gone so long that Charlotte felt moved to ask if something was wrong? Ceci Riegel stared at her coldly. The whites of Ceci's eyes too showed above the rims of the iris giving her a fey festive party-look at odds with her carelessly combed hair and a tiredness deep in her face. "With the meal?" she asked. "With the house? With us? With *you*? I don't know of anything wrong."

Charlotte had never been so rebuffed in her adult life. Barry too felt the force of the insult. After a long stunned moment Charlotte murmured an apology, and Barry too murmured something vague, placating, embarrassed.

They sat in suspension, not speaking, scarcely moving, until at last Paul returned. His cheeks were ruddy as if they'd been heartily slapped and his eyes were bright. He carried a bottle of his favorite Napa Valley wine which he'd been saving, he said, just for tonight. "This is a truly special occasion! We've really missed you guys!"

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They were up until two, drinking. Repeatedly Paul used the odd expression "guys" as if its sound, its grating musicality, had imprinted itself in his brain. "O.K. guys how's about another drink?" he would say, rubbing his hands together. "O.K. guys how the hell have you been?"

Next morning, a brilliantly sunny morning, no one was up before eleven. Paul appeared in swimming trunks and T-shirt in the kitchen at noon, boisterous, swaggering, unshaven, in much the mood of the night before – remarkable! The Riegels had hired a local handyman to shore up some rotting steps and the handyman was an oldish gray-grizzled black and after the man was paid and departed Paul spoke in an exaggerated comical black accent hugging Ceci and Charlotte around their waists until Charlotte pushed him away stiffly saying, "I don't think you're being funny, Paul." There was a moment's startled silence, then she repeated, vehemently, *"I don't think that's funny, Paul."*

As if on cue Ceci turned on her heel and walked out of the room.

But Paul continued his clowning. He blundered about in the kitchen pleading with "white missus"; bowing, shuffling, tugging what remained of his forelock; kneeling to pluck at Charlotte's denim skirt. His flushed face seemed to have turned to rubber, his lips red, moist, turned obscenely inside out. "Beg pardon white mussus! Oh white missus beg *par*don!"

Charlotte said, "I think we should leave."

Barry, who had been staring appalled at his friend, as if he'd never seen him before, said quickly, "Yes. I think we should leave."

They went to their room at the rear of the house leaving Paul behind and in a numbed stricken silence packed their things, each of them badly trembling. They anticipated one or both of the Riegels following them but neither did and as Charlotte yanked sheets off the bed, towels off the towel rack in the bathroom, to fold and pile them neatly at the foot of the bed, she could not believe that their friends would allow them to leave without protest.

With a wad of toilet paper she cleaned the bathroom sink as Barry called to her to please hurry. She examined the claw-footed tub – she and Barry had each showered that morning – and saw near the drain a tiny curly dark hair, hers or Barry's, indistinguishable, and this hair she leaned over to snatch up but her fingers closed in air and she tried another time still failing to grasp it then finally she picked it up and flushed it down the toilet. Her face was burning and her heart knocking so hard in her chest she could scarcely breathe.

The Carsons left the Riegels' cottage in Nantucket shortly after noon of the day following their arrival.

They drove seven hours back to their home with a single stop, silent much of the time but excited, nervously elated. When he drove, Barry kept

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glancing in the rear view mirror. One of his eyelids had developed a tic.

He said, "We should have done this long ago."

"Yes," Charlotte said, staring ahead at dry sun-lit rushing pavement. "Long ago."

That night in their own bed they made love for the first time in weeks, or months. "I love you," Barry murmured, as if making a vow, " – no one but you."

Tears started out of the corners of Charlotte's tightly shut eyes.

Afterward Barry slept heavily, sweating through the night. From time to time he kicked at the covers, but he never woke. Beside him Charlotte lay staring into the dark. What would become of them now? Something tickled her lips, a bit of lint, a hair, and though she brushed it irritably away the tingling sensation remained. What would become of them, now?

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Robert Julian

TRUFFAUT'S NOTES

Readers of autobiography are familiar with the scene when the author decides late in the narrative to set about writing the book in hand. Joyce and Proust made use of the form but did not invent it, and for St. Augustine, too, it may have been a canonic working of fate. François Truffaut, whose voluminous *Correspondance* (Cinq Continents) was published in 1988 in France (and it has recently appeared in English here*), set out early on the autobiographical road with his first and most famous movie, *Four Hundred Blows* (1958). There, too, the ups and downs of a Parisian childhood spawn the literary-cinematic event: the birth of a film-maker.

Truffaut's *Correspondance* begins in the thick of that romance, at age thirteen, and ends a few months before his death in 1984 at age fifty-two, but much of the interest of the 660-page volume lies in its dissident portrait of a man whose work is largely – and rightly – known as autobiographical. In a handful of incidents, Truffaut is unmistakably himself, or the character he represented most unforgettably as himself (Antoine Doinel, Jean-Pierre Léaud), as when he sells off his best friend's library to bail himself out of teenage debt; or volunteers for Indochina only to turn objector within the army a few months later; or urges the same friend at the age of twenty-six to mine their childhood letters for material for *Four Hundred Blows* ("Note down your ideas and memories for Antoine's running away from home. Dig out our letters . . . "). But as Truffaut's career gets underway, moving beyond what might be called his precocious culmination, other elements come to the surface, and one can only be struck by the heterogeneity of the facets which make up the apparently familiar face.

Events take second place. Even when writing to friends far away, there is little of the intellectual scene (some talk of Sartre but nothing of existentialism as such, structuralism, Lacan or Foucault) or even of political events like the 1968 student uprising or Vietnam. The film world receives far greater attention but more on a steady, day-to-day basis than in terms of dramatic occurrences. Rather, the letters set out thoughts which often take years to ripen: ideas unfold into films, slowly gaining on him by a process he described as "progressive encroachment," and films unwind back into ideas as

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**François Truffaut. Correspondence, 1945-1984.* Edited by Gilles Jacob and Claude de Givray. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $50.00.

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he mulls over the failure of works he had felt sure of (*Soft Skin*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Two English Girls*) and, drawing a conclusion, feels some of the sting fade away. This to-and-fro development leads his thought in so many different directions that the slow genesis which the letters offer is not that of Antoine Doinel at all, but only of the need for Doinel in Truffaut's completed life.

Beyond that surprise, at least one remarkable continuity is displayed: Truffaut's epistolary voice. It is not Léaud's clipped enthusiasm, nor is it the voice heard in *Two English Girls* (where Truffaut narrates in a winged but discreetly regretful way, like a messenger with bad news), nor the one he refuses to portray (the "voice of the father" in a film starring Léaud) at the request of a fellow director. Once his career is underway, it is a voice full of personability but at the same time impersonal, singularly warm but circumspect as well. "Don't count on me to preface [the] book with modesty, discretion or measure. André Bazin and Jean Renoir have been too important in my life for me to be able to speak of them without passion. *Jean Renoir* by André Bazin is naturally the *best* book of cinema, written by the *best* critic on the *best* director": that is the opening of his preface. On the same subject in the letters, he does not profess passion and nature at all. The key line is: " . . . after all, I'm not the only one who thinks Renoir is the world's greatest director" – which reads like a disclaimer of himself.

To know anything about Truffaut's nervous collapses, or his opinion on the events of May 1968, or his feelings paternal and otherwise for Doinel/Léaud, the reader will do better to consult his public writings which offer, in all, a franker presentation of the man. The letters but rarely go into personal affairs, and then most often because Truffaut has been contacted by a journalist who wants to know if he eats at La Coupole, what he plans to give for Christmas, and so on. People in show business, he observes in one letter, "must know how to let [themselves] be forgotten from time to time" by the public. But the correspondence suggests that he could not keep his part of the bargain. His private letters are noteworthy for their public tone, with an urbanity and composure closer to high epistolary tradition than to his individual talent. Apart from some of the letters to his American friend and collaborator Helen Scott, and one memorable exception ("I have a toothache which is killing me and have got to go to the dentist at once. But *first* I'll write . . . ") from his youth, there is no self-dramatization and little play with circumstances. Conversely, many of these letters must have been dictated and typed as business letters, but so thoroughly are they informed by a spirit of generosity and sympathy that, even when professional interests are at stake, one cannot escape the feeling that each letter has been written by a friend.

This aspect is conveyed, above all, in the tone. "In" words or allusions

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have no place in them (though the "buddie system" was one of the hallmarks of the avant-garde movement to which he belonged, the "Nouvelle Vague"). Indeed, he mentions at one point preferring "epistolary intimacy" to the directly verbal kind, and he is expert at finding reasons to write across town rather than be in touch in person or on the phone. In exchange, and as if by contract, Truffaut is extraordinarily giving of his time and energy when it comes to answering young artists who have sent him a manuscript or sought advice, or for writing out of the blue to compliment an actor or director for a performance, or to ask an associate not to take it badly that, this once, he has decided not to work with him on a film. Correspondents thus tend to become friends if they are not already. Curiously, he casts this seduction in geographical terms: "by my work and my way of life, I am a man of the Right Bank." But one understands where that claim, and the poise and regularity of the letters, come from. Truffaut rejects the high-keyed skittishness of the Left Bank artist. Instead of romantic torment, he prefers to express sentiments, recurring states like affection, emotion, sympathy, sincerity, and pleasure, which are plainly and in a somewhat artificial way psychological. It may be that this psychology (which is closer to Marivaux or Renoir than to abnormal or depth psychology, and only distantly akin to what Hitchcock called his "laws of suspense") offers us the only vantage possible on the flip side of the autobiographer's life, and there he plays a stock figure, the friend.

Although these letters have virtually no other subject than the cinema, they are similarly reserved about Truffaut's changing view of his art. His drift away from the New Wave and "my father Rossellini" is writ mostly between the lines, though there is one virulent, revealing clash (with Jean-Luc Godard) to make it unforgettable. More interesting, given the apocalyptic mood in the French film industry today, is how little the future of cinema seemed to worry him. (Again, he is less guarded in some of his published essays which speak of real and imagined difficulties facing the industry.) In a letter from 1963, Truffaut preaches to the Minister of Information that a "new public has been born," a public with "personalized reactions," and he appears to have remained convinced that, barring censorship, nothing could endanger the future of the art or its public. He sees television, today's culprit responsible for the closing of moviehouses, shrinking production budgets, and a generalized loss of nerve, in the same way: his only concern is that freedom of personal expression be maintained there as well. He is content to stay at home at night and watch the movie.

Three of Truffaut's early films were victims of what he called "the law of the scissors" but which was in fact a law of silence or of age restrictions. *Four Hundred Blows*, a movie about childhood, was originally banned for children; *Shoot the Piano-Player* and *Jules and Jim* were restricted on counts

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of nudity and alleged immorality. His experience of censorship was not uncommon for the period and for the New Wave in particular. It moved him to make what is probably his worst film, *Fahrenheit 451* in 1967, based on Ray Bradbury's novel, an attempt to visualize a world where books are no longer allowed to exist (the enemies of books burn them; the friends learn them by heart and so come to replace them). Truffaut spent years on the script, and he intended to shoot the film in America as his first English-language production. He also meant for the film to evoke an Eastern bloc nation, with costumes reminiscent of the Russian army: the film's question was meant to take in the globe. Although none of his films after 1961 were censored, his letters even in the 1970s remain sensitive to the issue. He writes that in his own work he has learned ruses to beat the censor, and he criticizes the silence forced upon films dealing with abortion and sexuality in France; upon some of his own films in socialist Algeria; upon books dealing with the French police and politics; and on television programs dealing with the cinema. Literally invited to do so, he refuses to make the issue into a personal crusade or to become paranoid about it. Unlike some radical members of the film industry after May 1968, he does not even care to see censorship disappear entirely. But there is good reason to think it was his personal apocalypse.

When he wrote in 1976 that he "owed his present liberty [as a filmmaker] to America," Truffaut was easily the most touted French director of the last fifteen years. However, the correspondence makes no secret of the material difficulty of operating in the film industry of the 1960s and 1970s, even when one was successful. But Truffaut's American "liberty" involved more than ease at finding a producer (Hollywood did give him financial support) or having his films well received (as they were in the United States). He meant having them received, that is, shown, at all. Although he was often derided for having "gone establishment," abandoning the marginal ethos of the New Wave for a more "respectable" kind of film, he did not defend himself as one might have expected: to be able to keep on making films of any kind, you need to be able to please the public. The argument is wrong on a nuance, confusing the masses, and the producer's bank account, with a public that does have "personalized reactions." Such a public exists, and it does not need to be catered to. In addition, this routine argument leaves one free to think, erroneously, that the major studios can censure as effectively as Church or State.

Without denying the power of the studios, Truffaut claimed that, any more than a publisher would seek to limit a book's success, would a studio seek to do anything but circulate its films. In his book of dialogues with Hitchcock, he even defended the studio's right to massively intervene in a film project. When Hitchcock was obliged to reconceive his screenplay for

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Suspicion (making Cary Grant the object of his wife's suspicions rather than her diabolical assassin) because the studio wanted to protect Grant's image, Truffaut came forth with a surprising justification. "It would be wrong to say that the [final] screenplay represented a compromise; it was simply *another* story . . . Indeed, the various censors and laws of Hollywood [helped to] purify this mystery plot. . . ." One may conclude that censorship was operative only when creation, or a conflicting creative issue, was denied altogether. Thus, in an important letter on his relation to "the establishment," his self-defense becomes even subtler and stranger, lopping off the self. It can be paraphrased: my sincerity as an artist is due to the fact that no one has ever imposed the choice of a film on me, not even myself. The proof of his independence is not that he had power or prestige enough to choose the films he would make. His essential liberty may well have been geographical (America in 1976, the Right Bank of Paris at other times), but it also involved the most intimate kind of experience, that "progressive encroachment" by which his films "chose him." The life of a film is telescoped into a creative process that needs to be protected and that he somehow felt was in danger.

Truffaut is known as one of the most literary film-makers of the postwar period. Doinel's dreams of literary grandeur are part of his charm, and Truffaut himself wrote numerous essays, books, screenplays, and (we now know) letters. Though he dropped out of school at the age of fourteen and considered himself as "self-taught and self-hating" (*un autodidacte qui se hait*), his artistic culture is essentially tied to European high culture, the written word. Even more than a film-goer, the film-maker is steeped in literature. And so it is logical that, along with his endless variations on the desire to write, the discussion of censorship instinctively leads to an analogy between film and the written word. The creative act is threatened in both cases, and his defense of free expression (in terms recalling Montesquieu and Voltaire) makes out a single claim for both forms. But there are passages in the letters to show that censorship did not stand so clearly apart. If Truffaut left his mark as an "auteur" by projecting the desire to write upon the urge to make films, he also recognized that the writer's craft could stifle cinematic creation.

Criticism offers the easiest example. Though he began as a polemical critic for the *Cahiers du cinéma* (and was often brilliant at it), he soon came to feel that criticism was no less than an injury to works of art *and* to artists, and that the only acceptable writing on film was done by what he called "writers on film" rather than critics. He may even have discovered his own film career through criticism, but the form was no less pernicious. He regularly expressed his preference for "intuition" over "intelligence," yet it may come as a surprise that he was no more comfortable at the other extreme.

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Truffaut refused to adapt a number of great literary works in the course of his career. These include novels by Proust, Camus, Céline, and others, which he said it would be "sacrilege" to film. Respect for the masterpiece probably mingles here with remembered animosity. The so-called "Tradition of Quality" in French cinema, which the New Wave began by revolting against, was based on the idea that adapting great literature would almost automatically yield great movies. For Truffaut, the cinema did not need any help. And yet, he himself adapted a considerable number of literary works, by authors including William Irish, David Goodis, Bradbury, Henri-Pierre Roché, and Henry James. Although he vowed in 1963 that *Fahrenheit* would be his last adaptation (no more books!), he did not keep his word. Along with the names mentioned, he also contemplated works by Nabokov, Wiesel, O'Henry, Malraux, and Simenon. At best, he began a complex game of hide-and-seek with literature, in which his ambivalence was allowed full rein. After writing the script of *Pocket Money*, he rewrote it as a novel. For *The Man Who Loved Women*, in contrast, he first wrote a novel on the basis of his idea for a film and then set about turning it into a screenplay. Whereas he had the novel of *Fahrenheit* distributed at the premier of the film, Truffaut asked his collaborators not to reveal that *The Green Room* was based on two short stories by Henry James.

These last examples suggest that what from the critic's point of view is conflict between literature and film may well be for the artist cross-fertilization. Whatever one calls it, though, even Truffaut's mature judgements remain contradictory on the question of how an idea becomes a screenplay and then a film. Indirectly, they point toward problems in the art (and not just the industry) of film-making, problems which involve more than finances or reception: they concern the status of film as a modern art form. In a letter to Hitchcock (the director "with the finest sense of film as spectacle and as writing"), he can praise the adaptation of literary works because they possess an extra dimension, a complexity, where the original screenplay is merely bent on depicting action. But writing to the Italian novelist Mario Soldati, he submits that when "action and dialogue" are overshadowed in the novel by the author's commentary, the work can be only "disfigured" by being brought to the screen. This insight did not prevent him on another occasion from urging a team of script-writers to forego dialogue as they worked (it can always be improvised later) and simply concentrate on describing the scenes in prose, or in the Hitchcock book from praising the "laws of Hollywood" for "dedramatizing" the novel Hitchcock adapted for *Suspicion*. It becomes difficult to know if the literary imagination is an obstacle to film-making or the road itself toward film-making. And what, for that matter, is literature?

A panacea: in 1974 he admitted having been "afraid of the blank

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page" and explained that he circumvented his fear by adapting "American novels." But the fear would come to seem "excessive," from which it followed that American or any other literature was merely a tool (and no cure at all), something to fill the screen, something foreign. And in fact, references to literature outside the context of film are rare in Truffaut's letters. He swears by Balzac and Jacques Audiberti but otherwise has surprisingly little to say on literary production, past or present. He remains a fervent, "systematic" reader but in one odd genre only, actors' memoirs. As for the works he adapted, as Freud wrote in regard to prostitutes, they are patently secondary. He draws almost exclusively on detective novels or so-called minor authors (Roché), as if "literature" was, by definition, something sublime and unattainable, Doinel's dream.

Perhaps the gravest symptom of the crisis underway in French filmmaking today is what is referred to as the scarcity of original screenplays. The publication of Truffaut's correspondence (the first, we are told, of several volumes once the editorial search is carried out) is clearly meant to renew confidence in the industry. But one may also see in this three-and-a-half pound, quarto paperback something like a funeral monument. Quoting Jean Cocteau's saying, "You must sing in your family tree," Truffaut in his films assumed the heritage of Hitchcock and especially of Renoir with complete maturity. It may have been in the nature of that heritage that this man who loved literature also made sure the affair went unrequited.

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George Edwards

THE PLEASURE OF ITS BEING OVER: A VIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

Returning to New York late last spring from ten idyllic weeks in rural France, I found I could hardly pick up a book, newspaper, or magazine without running across some reference to the horrors of contemporary music. It all began when, thumbing at random through Robert M. Adams's *Bad Mouth*, I came upon the following sentence:

> I think this [the acceptance of the ugly] is most apparent in the striking instance of modern music, where the patter of polite applause that greets every new atonal horror may indeed conceal the presence of a few musicians who understand and genuinely appreciate what they're applauding – but which comes for the most part from people who find what they have heard to be hideous and incomprehensible, but are ashamed to say so.

The sting of this well-aimed thrust, delivered almost offhand and without any special animus, was perhaps mitigated by the fact that Adams's target is all the arts in the twentieth-century; music is merely the most striking example, not a special case. Surely, I thought, if abstract paintings can sell for millions, there must be hope that enlightened listeners can accept new music, too. This comforting thought did not prepare me to find, two days later, the following sentence in a poetry review by William Logan in *The New York Times Book Review*:

> Reading Mr. Palmer's poetry is like listening to serial music or slamming your head against a streetlight stanchion – somewhere, you're sure, masochists are lining up to enjoy the very same thing, but for most people the only pleasure it can bring is the pleasure of its being over.

Again, "serial" music is not the real target of this attack. But I began to find it ominous that modern music, usually simply ignored, should be assumed to be so universally detestable as to provide a useful point of comparison with anything else held to be loathsome. Moreover, when compared with the

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Adams, this more recent broadside seemed to suggest that haters of modern music, previously ashamed of their inability to respond to it, were now coming out of the closet.

Sensitized by these snippets, and by a short but exemplary quotation from Kingsley Amis's attacks on the music of the sixties in "Girl, 20" (in *The New Yorker*, June 12, 1989), I was unable to muster my usual display of indifference to the latest eruption of Donal Henahan's spleen in *The New York Times* Arts and Leisure section (June 11, 1989). In a column entitled, "Whatever Happened to Music?," he links the (presumed) paucity of "exciting and durable compositions" since World War II to the "dead-end dogmas" of the "academic avant-garde." Whatever the merit of this claim, Henahan presents it less as a coherent argument than as Agnewesque invective. In fact, he seems less interested in convincing the ordinary reader of his case than in intimidating modernist composers. His contemptuous tone and certainty of the verdict of history reminded me of the invective of repression in China, and caused me to wonder whether an atmosphere could be created in which the composition or performance of "ugly" music could actually be suppressed. I dismissed this paranoid notion on the grounds that – as long as it finds no way to desecrate the Flag or depict homosexual acts – music is too unimportant in our society to be worth quashing.

A roundup review of new compact discs by Andrew Pincus (*The New York Times*, June 18, 1989) presented a change of tone which was at first welcome. Here the "Midas touch" of the Great Performer "transforms 'new music' – that dreadful crabbed thing – into simply music, though of this century." "Angular skips, broken rhythms, atonality, pounding dissonances – all the tricks of the contemporary composer are turned into art that breathes as naturally as Chopin." Wow! All this time, it turns out, the fault was with bad performances, not with "dead-end dogmas," "post-Webernean serialism," or "gray academic music"; as Schoenberg said, "My music isn't dissonant, it's just badly played." All this seemed too good to be true. Sure enough, Pincus continues: "A cynic might even argue that this is a case of a spectacular performance making a work sound better than it really is." Got it? If it's ugly, blame the composer; if not, credit the performer's magical transformation of dross into gold.

As a composer, I'm accustomed to being regarded as at best marginal. There are many social occasions when I would love to be able to say, "I'm in stocks and bonds" (which perhaps I would have been in seventeenth-century Salem) rather than exposing myself to the almost inevitable "and what kind of music do you write?" I'm as prepared as most for the typically nasty, brutish, and short review; my normal response to being pilloried is to immerse myself in new work, as if eternally optimistic that its reception will be

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different from that of what preceded it. Perhaps it will. Perhaps the gap between what many composers want to write and what most music-lovers want to hear can somehow be closed. Some examination of the origins of the gap between composers and the musical public might help clarify the nature of our current problem.

Until the late eighteenth-century, the word "music," if unqualified, meant "new music." The composer was typically employed by the church or the court, and provided music for a social, economic, and cultural elite, many of whose members performed (or even composed) themselves. This audience had little knowledge of or interest in "old" music (which in 1770 would have included what Bach and Handel had written barely twenty years before), but was quite familiar with the sort of up-to-date music a composer was likely to produce.

Late in the eighteenth century, this aristocratic patronage began to be replaced by public concerts for an expanding middle-class audience. This development coincided with a nascent interest in the revival of old music (a revival spearheaded at first by aristocratic connoisseurs and by composers), and with an astonishing explosion of new works of great power and originality (Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, etc.). But while the successful composer gained new freedom and prestige (becoming almost a god in the nineteenth century), the risks of failure correspondingly increased. Haydn made the transition from respected employee to public success; Mozart failed at both. Even Beethoven depended on noble largesse long before his music went out of fashion as the rage for Rossini swept Vienna in the 1820s. (Ironically, Rossini himself is thought to be the first composer to retire from composition when *his* work went out of fashion.) While composers as late as Liszt and Wagner continued to benefit from court positions or royal patronage, many others, like Schubert, barely scraped by on publishers' fees and temporary teaching positions.

The opposition of an increasingly passive and musically untrained audience (whose tendency to nap in the slow movement was exploited as early as Haydn's "Surprise" Symphony) to anything new became increasingly marked, as did its veneration for the "classics." Yet often enough (as with Wagner) it was the musically unwashed who championed the "music of the future." Since subtlety and finesse were lost on a mass audience, the composer's relation to his public often took on an element of sadism – as Nietzsche says of Wagner, "he repeats a thing so often that we become desperate – and end up believing it." The adoration/mistrust of audience for composer and the dependency/contempt of composer for audience are reflected in commonplaces such as "the great composer is always ahead of his time." (Schoenberg: "beauty begins just when the non-creative person begins

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to note its absence.") By the late nineteenth century, the idea of the avant-garde was firmly established, and was associated with pseudo-Darwinian notions of inevitable progress towards higher and more complex forms of musical life. Those listeners who could not adapt to the new were presumably fit only for the concentration camp of "music appreciation."

The tension between composer and audience reached a crisis in the early twentieth century. Important new works routinely provoked riots or scandals before eventually being absorbed into the maw of the standard repertoire. With Schoenberg, the self-described "reactionary who was forced to become a revolutionary," we reach the crux of the problem: a composer whose works have inspired and influenced thousands of musicians (especially composers), but which still retain enough of their original sting to repel the average listener. In a brilliant series of works composed between 1899 and 1912, Schoenberg moved inexorably from the post-Wagnerism of *Verklärte Nacht* (refused for performance by a Vienna concert society because of one forbidden chord) into the uncharted regions of atonality (or, as Schoenberg unavailingly insisted, "pantonality"). These quintessentially modernist works, with their extreme intensity of expression and avoidance of both conventional tonal relationships and the kinds of textures, forms, and rhetoric these relationships had supported, met with such hostility that Schoenberg and his disciples retreated into the "Society for the Private Performance of Music" between 1918 and 1921.

Schoenberg's postwar efforts to consolidate his compositional gains aroused even more vituperation than had the more revolutionary works that preceded them. As he codified the new harmonic world he had created into the still notorious "method of composing with twelve tones related only to one another," he clearly felt that the replacement of tonality with a new harmonic system justified the revival of traditional motivic treatment, rhythm, phrasing, and form. To most listeners, a work such as the Suite op. 29 must sound (as it once did to me) like a grotesque parody of conventional music – Brahms with all the pitches changed. Schoenberg's twelve-tone works were condemned, not only by the conservative retrenchment of the thirties (populist in America, Fascist or Communist elsewhere), but also (and for different reasons) by the born-again European avant-garde of the fifties. Yet they rank among the most courageous and successful attempts to write modernist music which is also firmly attached to tradition.

The reception of Schoenberg's music should alert us to the fact that music is currently in a much worse position than any of the other arts. In poetry, for example, new work is criticized for failing to reach the exalted levels achieved by modernist works of Yeats, Eliot, Stevens, and Pound. Whatever the limitations of these poets, they are now part of the canon.

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Music, on the contrary, is commonly perceived to have taken the wrong road the moment it ventured into modernism; those who continue along this road are usually condemned, not (as they well might be) by comparison with Schoenberg, but along with him.

Even if we regard Schoenberg as an exceptional case, we would still need to note the extreme difficulty with which any new and challenging music is assimilated. The cases of Mahler and Ives suggest that it is not unusual for a piece of music to begin to become acceptable to the musical public some forty to fifty years after its date of composition. That this belated acceptance of the new is much more typical of music than of the other arts was perhaps best explained by Roger Sessions:

> . . . in listening to a work which is familiar, we can let our minds wander freely . . .We do not necessarily have to pay close attention to avoid being bored, as is the case with practically every other art, including the theatre.

The problem with unfamiliar music is that this same casual and intermittent listening soon results in boredom, disorientation, and frustration, even when the unfamiliar work is inherently no more difficult to understand than some of the music the listener has already come to terms with. When the unfamiliar work is also new, it necessarily lacks the prestige of a music-historical brand-name: its chances of getting the benefit of any doubt are poor.

The minimalist music of composers like Glass and Reich appears to have decisively broken the pattern of the belated acceptance of the new, appealing even (or perhaps especially) to those who normally have no interest in classical music. Minimalism may be no more than a fad, different from others in the twentieth century only in its commercial success; but we cannot rule out the possibility that it may represent an historic watershed comparable to the change from Renaissance polyphony to early Baroque monody, or from the polyphony of Bach to the simplistic homophony of the pre-Classics. In either case, modernism will have to face (as Bach and Schoenberg did) the double jeopardy of being too difficult when new and unfashionable when old.

Yet the absurdity of labeling our time "postmodern" becomes clear as soon as one recognizes that, at least in music, ours cannot be the first postmodern period (it may not even be the last). Whether we compare Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913) with Symphony in C (1940), Bartok's *Third Quartet* (1927) with his *Concerto for Orchestra* (1943), or Copland's

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Piano Variations (1930) with *Appalachian Spring* (1944), the same picture emerges: the thirties and forties were as inhospitable to modernism as are the eighties. Most composers adapted to these circumstances, and in some cases their conservative music was stronger than their earlier modernist works. Even Schoenberg returned to tonality in some works, a move which had hardly any effect on his unpopularity; Varèse chose nearly twenty years of silence until the early fifties.

Only a prophet could have predicted in 1939 that musical modernism, apparently dead, would get its revenge in the 1950s. To the European Darmstadt School composers (Berio, Boulez, Stockhausen, et al), coming of age in a continent which had been physically and morally almost destroyed, there appeared to be little worth saving from the past. As André Hodeir admiringly puts it, "In abandoning tonality, music had entered a singularly coherent universe of privative attributes. The new values were: rhythmic and melodic *dis*continuity, *ir*rational rhythm, *a*thematicism, *non*-tonality . . . " Many of the composers who first explored these negative values through "total serialism" (the extension of Schoenberg's twelve-tone method to all musical "parameters") soon discovered they could obtain similar results much more easily by aleatoric means. As Ernst Krenek said:

> . . . the composer has come to distrust his inspiration because it is not really as innocent as it was supposed to be, but rather conditioned by a tremendous body of recollection, tradition, training, and experience. In order to avoid the dictations of such ghosts, he prefers to set up an impersonal mechanism which will furnish, according to premeditated patterns, unpredictable situations.

Amazingly, even ideas like these did not always prevent the composition of interesting music. In America, blessed among other things with the presence of important European composers in the thirties and forties (Bartok, Hindemith, Schoenberg, Stravinsky), and with the survival of a native tradition of modernist composers (Ives, Ruggles, Cowell, Seeger, Sessions), the second wave of modernism took a less virulent form. On the other hand, American modernists such as Babbitt, Carter, Perle, and Shifrin lacked the Jacobin zeal and gift for self-promotion of their European counterparts. Lacking public support, they tended to retreat to the university, where their concerts often took on some of the character of Schoenberg's Society for the Private Performance of Music.

Since they have had little impact on the "'real" musical world, American academic modernists, however numerous and persistent, are not to be

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blamed, as Henahan thinks, for any malaise of contemporary music as a whole. That most modernist works are mediocre is not especially noteworthy: this is true of all music, regardless of when, where, or how it is written. One can question, however, whether even the best modernist works of the past forty years will ever join the standard repertoire. (The whole idea of a "standard repertoire," based as it is on a mere one hundred-fifty years of orchestral music, may be obsolete; but that's another subject.) Instead, like the isorhythmic motets of Dufay, secular music of the Papal court at Avignon, the keyboard music of Froberger, or the late musical graffiti of Rossini, they will perhaps appeal only to a limited, if sophisticated audience. In today's reactionary climate, it is not surprising that most modernists are writing music that is much less forbidding than what they would have written ten or fifteen years ago. While many former modernists have abandoned the ship entirely, there is also a surprisingly large number of able young composers who are writing music with modernist characteristics. I find it especially encouraging that, unlike many of their elders (the Krenek quotation represents an extreme case), these composers are more interested in the musical results they get than in arcane (and often inaudible) compositional techniques.

The main alternatives to modernism seem to have in common an attempt to pretend that the twentieth century never happened. The tribal rituals, simple harmony, and love of literal repetition of the minimalists represent not only a reaction against modernism, but a desire to begin the history of music over again. The fact that (unlike the most prominent neoromantics) the minimalists rejected modernism before they had mastered it may explain the striking similarities between minimalism and the worst academic modernism. In modernism, discontinuity becomes a permanent condition, as obvious continuity does in minimalism; in either case the rate of musical change is much less varied than in most previous music. In the worst modernist music, the constant saturation of musical space leads inadvertently to a sense of harmonic stasis; harmonic stasis is the favorite condition of minimalist music. Modernism tends to avoid repetition altogether; minimalism merely negates its potential structural power by using it incessantly in detail.

Even more revealing are the underlying ideological similarities between modernism and minimalism. I take the central minimalist claim, articulated by Steve Reich, to be that:

> . . . when all the cards are on the table and everyone hears what is gradually happening . . . there are still enough mysteries to satisfy all. These mysteries are the impersonal, psycho-acoustic by-products of the intended process. These might include submelodies heard within repeated melodic patterns, stereophonic effects due to listener loca-

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> tion, slight irregularities in performance, harmonics, different (*sic*) tones, etc.

This quotation, with its glorification of the accidental results of a rigid process, is strikingly reminiscent of the Darmstadt manifestoes of the fifties – compare the second sentence with Krenek's "impersonal mechanisms which will furnish . . . unpredictable situations." Despite the desire of minimalism to reject modernism in its entirety, the two share a preference for impersonal means and random result. Is this the best lesson minimalism could have learned from the twentieth century?

What, besides opportunism, accounts for the current wave of neoromanticism? Henahan quotes Boulez as saying in an interview:

> I am sure that as long as you haven't absorbed the history that comes before you, you can't go very far. As we say in France, you are opening doors that are already open.

Oddly enough, this unexceptionable echo of Santayana is one of the "dead-end" dogmas Henahan objects to! The sheer ineptness of much neoromantic plundering of the past seems to bear Boulez out, and to arouse the suspicion that for some composers the allure of past styles is due to never having learned about them in school. Yet the neoromanticism of such able and diverse composers as Del Tredici, Harbison, and Schwantner is a natural reaction against the narrowness of much recent modernism, not a coherent movement with defined methods or goals. Those who insist on "opening doors which are already open" will be hard-pressed to compete with Erich Korngold or Max Steiner, let alone Richard Strauss. But it seems likely that much neoromanticism, like Stravinsky's neoclassicism, will prove to have been less a return to the past than a continuation of a modernist approach by other means.

We must credit minimalism and neoromanticism for the fact that our musical institutions are now more willing to perform new music than at any time in the past forty years. In addition, there has been some revival of interest in conservative composers who were out of fashion during the second modernist phase. Even older modernists like Babbitt and Carter are at last getting some of the public attention they deserve. But for virtually all other composers who are unable or unwilling to write easy, accessible music, the situation is as grim as ever.

Indeed, while we can rejoice that so much new music is performed (or lament the new music that isn't), we can only guess what the audience actu-

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ally hears. As William Bolcom puts it:

> . . . for most folks, especially professional people, classical music has become a kind of pleasant background for the day. Yet agents and orchestra programmers continue to offer fare that is essentially the same as what an audience member might have heard in a tony boutique or restaurant that day. Perhaps one reason people have stopped going to concerts is that the novelty of hearing background music played "live" simply wears off.

The debased use of classical music as muzak is ubiquitous. I've heard Beethoven in a public urinal, snippets of Bach and Vivaldi at the ends of innings of televised Yankees games, bowderlized Mozart to advertise perfume, quotations from Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms as background to television comics, and amazingly sophisticated (if computer-performed) neoromantic background music for television crime shows. Gentrification and Baroque music appear to have been made for one another. Minimalism may offer a few the opportunity to concentrate on "acoustic by-products" which would pass unnoticed in a musical discourse of any complexity; but for most listeners, its lulling use of repetition guarantees its suitability as yet another chic form of muzak. Finally, a magazine ad informs me that New Age music provides "beautiful environments for home, car or office, useful for meditation, relaxation, massage and movement" – it's harmful only if you listen to the stuff. Can anyone actually listen to anything any more? Is the utter trivialization of great music the final consequence of making it easily available to all? A Peter Ustinov sketch once suggested that only ugliness could resist being reduced to muzak. If so, then modernist music, with its insistence that the listener really listen, may be the only truly reactionary music (or even the only music) we have.

I may seem to be leaving the subject of contemporary music and its possible audience in a worse state than I found it, and to have begun to drag classical music as a whole down with it to boot. Yet I have heard strong neoromantic works; and minimalism seems to compensate for the glacial pacing of the individual work by the rapidity with which it is recapitulating the history of music. No one can yet judge the possibilities for various hybrid musics. There will probably always be a few oddballs who take music seriously; they will be the only audience that matters. In any case, like those seventeenth-century soldiers who continued to wear armor long after battle was dominated by guns, I expect to continue writing romantic works in my own dialect of modernism.

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Péter Esterházy

GOD'S HAT

Schadenfreude

I get the malicious thrill known as *Schadenfreude* whenever I see a Western reporter on a visit to Hungary the Beautiful squirming and shifting from foot to foot and gnawing at his pen.

Things weren't always like this. Time was when a native like me interested in knowing what was going on here and how it tallied with the latest in world trends had only to open a decent Western newspaper to feel like Snow White: Hungary was invariably the fairest of them all.

Yet much as he read, he knew he was one of the dwarfs – ugly, puny, poor, and trudging through the mines knee-deep in lies.

It all started long before Gorbachev – back in the midsixties, actually – when Hungary was the most bearable (the liveliest barrack) of the so-called socialist countries and reporters spent all their time at the Hotel Forum or in the fashionable Váci Street district sipping dry sherry with the downtrodden Hungarian folk.

Now had the Hungarian folk been allowed to feast their eyes on those papers, they'd immediately have stopped cursing the system or questioning it or even grumbling, so had I been what was then known as a Communist leader, I'd have ordered them distributed throughout the land instead of outlawed. In fact, had any one of the papers been available in Budapest, Bucharest, Berlin, or Prague, the old regimes might be alive and well today.

And if my concrete *Schadenfreude* drizzles mist-like over the Western press, it is because this will appear after the Great Hungarian Elections and has nothing – but nothing – to say about the current political situation. At last! The moment I've been waiting for: not only I know nothing, the Western press knows nothing. On the one hand, we Central Europeans have maintained quite superciliously that Central Europe can be truly understood only from within; on the other, that to be Central Europeans means not to know ourselves.

Editor's Note: This essay first appeared in the German weekly *Stern*, on March 29, 1990.

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What Cannot Be Understood?

I would modestly maintain that nothing can be understood, neither the object described nor the language used to describe it nor the person doing the describing (*O Wittgenstein, why hast thou forsaken me?* as the poet once said.)

The language a Hungarian or perhaps any Central European uses is alien and strange even after translation. Out of joint. Its reference system is different: it doesn't use words in a "leftist" or "liberal" or "sixties" kind of way; it's more lyrical, I'd say, masterly or masterless, but in any case highly personal – verbal bouquets for facts, metaphors for theories. And to make matters worse, we speak a language so personal that for the last forty years we haven't known who the person is. In other words – woe is us! – the wicked Bolsheviks are not the only fools; our own dear people are no better, myself included (N. B. You too, distant Reader. Post-Yalta Europe has made fools of us all. From Lisbon to Stockholm, from Bucharest to London – the whole continent is one big idiot factory.)

All right, we use words differently, but there's still the issue of incomprehensibility.

After all, why are the worthy Hungarians, who gave the world a soccer champion or two and Bartók and were the first to dismantle the jerrybuilt construct known as real socialism and kindle the torch of hope throughout Europe, why instead of basking confidently, optimistically in its flames, do they shrug their shoulders like so many Knights of Resignation? Why is Pozsgay, whom everyone there (here) considers the Hungarian Gorbachev, more often than not merely tolerated here (there)? Why is Foreign Minister Gyula Horn – the Hero of the Iron Curtain, the man who toppled East Germany singlehandedly by letting their people go (rumor has it he was offered Prussia but modestly declined), a man whose portrait dangles between the breasts of every German mother – why should Gyula Horn be a category unto himself just because on a radio program called "Politicians in Slippers" he announced he enjoyed reading the author of these lines and is *therefore* a truly important person?

In other words, why the paralysis, the pusillanimity, the lack of style; Why can't they see that they've started something they haven't finished? That the sheep in wolf's clothing or vice versa, the one they've thrown out of the door, will climb back in through the window? Why must that analogy be followed by the statement that both door and window have ceased to exist? What does exist?

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Truth, or Flaubert's Monition, or "Animal triste post coitum"

Now is the time for me to tell you what the truth is; that's part of my contract, after all. Besides, we need truth as we need bread – you and I both – because (and this is growing more and more drastically clear) all bread is *one*.

Let me first, as is my wont, turn to Flaubert.

Flaubert warned the Hungarians in vain. You will remember how at the end of *L'Education sentimentale* Frédéric and Deslauriers are going on excitedly about an old brothel escapade of theirs, constantly complementing each other's recollections:

> "It was the best time we ever had," said Frédéric.
> "Yes, I think you're right," said Deslauriers. "It was the best time we ever had."

The Hungarians, however, got all dressed up one Sunday while the faithful were at vespers, put together two bouquets from Madame Moreau's finest flowers, went out into the fields through the gate and, having circled the vineyard, returned by way of the Pêcherie and sneaked into La Turque's establishment, still clutching their posies.

Flaubert's characters ran away before the escapade was consummated, but not the Hungarians! They got just what they wanted, just what you'd expect from such a place; it's no wonder that afterwards they sat sadly (*triste*) on the riverbank behind the bastion.

Behind the Bastion

So there we sit, freely, democratically, La Turque's perfume (Krasnaya Moskva?) still in our nostrils. If we look at *close* range, we see a humdrum existence, rising prices, bags under eyes, an immutable gray terror. If we look *into the distance*, we're euphoric: Europe has changed, hasn't it? Even as I write, as I write these very words, Europe is changing! And who can tell what is in store for us, what undreamt-of wonders are yet to come! Yet if we look a bit *further*, we're horrified. We see our starving, impatient, raggle-taggle Europe seducing Rich Europe into quick! giving us everything, things even it can no longer afford, and forsaking its own self-imposed limitations – we're perfectly happy with second-class goods, who cares if they give off a little smoke, they're a hundred times better than what we've had till now – in other words, you see the basest, most primitive and aggressive brand of capitalism bearing down on us and itself at our own behest. Of man's supposed threat to nature Central Europe is completely innocent; we

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regard it as either Western squeamishness or a Bolshevik plot and feel there is no cause for concern to say nothing of alarm.

So here we sit, looking and gazing; here we sit, screwing up our eyes. And the name we give our squint-eyed sit is "our European homeland."

The European Dog, European Water, and the European Problem

It's as if we'd come through a war. Everything is in ruins. We try to remember what "normal" is like, but we have no recollection; we have to start from scratch. And we're not particularly wild about recalling details. We'd rather go on about how our heroic opposition routed the system, which is true, though it wasn't so heroic as all that and the past forty years were anything but heroic – a pile of shit is more like it.

In 1956 the country and its people shook off the system as a dog shakes off water. We haven't yet shaken off the Kádár regime, because we still can't tell where the dog stops and the water begins. As I see it, each "new" East-Central European country has a dog/water problem. The desire for revenge is snowballing everywhere, dividing populations into us and them. Even taking into account the wide discrepancy in matters of responsibility, we cannot ignore the fact that neither Kádár nor Honecker created the whole mess *by himself*. (The diabolical Hitler leading the worthy and well-intentioned German people by the nose. . . .) Things are more problematical than that.

And we seem unprepared to deal with the problem. In the good old days the German Democratic Republic was a prison surrounded by barbed wire and the Federal Republic of Germany *eo ipso* the Free Germany with a clear-cut political agenda – a less than radical, rather pedestrian view of things to come, but an agenda nonetheless with both a past and a future. And now? What now for the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany? Reunification, of course, and rightly so, I think, but what will it *mean*? What will be its framework, legal and historical? You can't just turn tin Lizzie GDR Trabants into state-of-the-art FRG Mercedes; no, there's a new car in the making: A Mercedes with a glued-on Trabant. And think of all the problems involved. Driving licenses. Speed limits. And most important: the environment. (In those good old days, ten years ago, when there was still an East Berlin, it was there, in East Berlin, that I liked the Four-Power Agreement best, and I loved the Four-Power Agreement, that and a little Greek bar in Lenin Square. Those were the days when you could still make a splash with a Trabant, and I would cover the Kurfürstendamm

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with a marvelous blue smoke screen, and people would stop and stare with great respect: imagine getting "that thing" to move. It had a nice little leftish image to it as well.)

The European Style

According to a Hungarian proverb, if the Earth is God's hat, then Hungary is the posy on it. Let me take it one step further and say that if the Earth is God's hat then Germany is the posy on it. Everything is a posy these days here in Europe. All we need to know now is whether God's hat is the Earth, and the battle is as good as won. That is Europe's most pressing question.

Questions of style are the only eternal questions.

Translated from the German by Michael Henry Heim

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POEMS

James Dickey

SHOW US THE SEA

-an opening fragment

Real God, roll
roll as a result
Of a whole thing: ocean:
Thís: wide altar-shudder of miles

Given twelve new dead-level powers
Of glass, in borrowed binoculars, set into

The hand-held eyes of thís man

And no other, his second son coming to his head

Like Armageddon, with the last wave. Real God,
Through both hands and my head, in depth-bright distance, roll
In raw free sharpness

Of sight, and let my son come,
Exploding with proximity, and with him bring voices
Faintly around him, the sounds not matching
The size of their magnified bodies. No harm; I am invisible

With sand. The sea, only, is on-coming
Face-on, with my boy's
Impact incandescent on my head
as he strikes

A hero's improbable stance: flesh that would be bronze,
Be stone, the form of stone, struck from within

The stone. Statue, yes: creature lured into being
By gestures it has chosen in its sleep.

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Yehuda Amichai

WE DID WHAT WAS EXPECTED OF US

We did what was expected of us.
We went out with our children
to pick mushrooms in the same forest
we'd planted when we were children.

We learned the names of wild flowers
whose smell was as sweet
as senselessly spilt blood.
We put great love into small bodies.
We stood alternately enlarged and diminished
in the eyes of the mad, divine bearer of binoculars.

And in the war between light and darkness
we loved the good and quieting dark,
and hated the aching light.
We did what was expected of us.
We loved our children
more than our homeland.
We've dug all the wells in the ground
and now we're digging into space –
wells, wells, without beginning and without end.

We did what was expected of us.
We arranged our lives in flower beds and shade,
and straight pleasant walks
as in the garden of an asylum for the insane.

Our despair is domesticated and grants us tranquility.
Only the hopes remain –
wild and vociferous hopes
break the night and tear the day.

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We did what was expected of us.
We were like those who enter a movie theater
passing the flushed or pale exiters
building quietly or laughing out loud.
And they enter without a second glance, without
turning, into the light and the darkness and the light.
We did what was expected of us.

Translated from the Hebrew by Karen Alkalay-Gut

Priscilla Sneff

LET A MAN . . .

Let a man now meditate on the sound: the
Doctor's laugh – the soft sawing, as if music,
Shushing. . . . But this whine serpentines beyond the
Staff of the Physick.

Let a man now meditate upon touch: the
Doctor's hands. How easily are the organs
Simplified, and how tenderly tied by such
Strands as the surgeon's . . .

Let a man live. Let a man live forever,
Keeping watch over the much longer era
Than nineteen-fifty till -eighty-seven, nor
Pace in terra . . .

Let a man now meditate on the breath: the
Doctor's breath, how it gradually comes stiller . . .
Heal me! *Stiller*. Heal me. Nor have I faith in
Death as a healer.

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Alfonso Gatto

ANNIVERSARY

I remember those days: in the unknown
morning where the terror of being left alone
was to awaken us, I heard the sky
like a dead voice. And already the light,
forsaken from those dying at the windows,
touched my forehead and left
the mark of its eternal sleep on my hair.

A human cry that could be heard, nothing –
only the snow – and they all were alive
to weep behind that wall, silence
drank the land's tears in rivers.

Oh, Europe frozen to the heart
never again will thaw: alone, with the dead
that love her in eternity, she will be white
without boundaries, united by snow.

Translated from the Italian by Philip Parisi

Len Roberts

GIFT SHOP IN PÉCS

They paint yellow and red flowers
        on the white vases,
with pale green leaves and stems,
some with dark blue centers,
three dark blue circles with X's.
The embroidery, too, and the small
        carved walnut boxes,
flowers jutting out everywhere, not
        one Jew on the train
to Auschwitz, which is not so far
        from here,

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not one young wife with two children
dragged from her side. And
African masks, the death mask, the
life mask, the mask
of love chiseled in a jade-like stone,
so heavy I could hardly pick it up
to see the naked bodies, the veils
covering and uncovering
them. I almost bought the many-armed
Lady from India, the Wise Fool
from Vietnam, I almost paid the full
thousand forints
for the hand-made Polish moccasins
with the pointed toes
and small beaded white horses, smaller
men with sabers drawn
as they ride off the stitched edge.
I had to lift them all to feel their weight,
I had to bring them close so I could see
the tiny hands and feet, the
curve of an arm, the straight nose, the
buckle on his shoe, the gilly-
flower on hers, I had to feel the heaviness
of their dreams, the foolishness
of their hopes as they dipped thick bread
into the bowls, as they
snuffed out the candles name by name
by the tiny carved altar, I had to bend
to hear their silence
as they bowed from the waist and curtsied,
stiff-legged, without
a single moan, not one face turned
away, not one hand raised
as they began their strange dance
on the dustless shelves.

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David St. John

"WHO IS SHE . . ."

after Cavalcanti

Who is she, coming along the street, turning the heads
Of men and angels, making the night air so
Tense, so trembling with clarity that even those poets
Who adore ranting about love can only sigh?

And God! When she just happens to glance your way, well,
Let love tell it, I can't even begin
To describe the way her modesty makes other women
Grovel and weep in utter wretchedness.

And nothing I can say is really relevant; every word simply
Grows transparent held up to her body, draped
In a cloak woven by time, threads of beauty and Godhead . . .

No surprise that our lofty ideals and tender, healing voices
All fade before such an extravagance of grace –
Whose charms we'll never hold, in our minds, nor in our arms.

Sydney Lea

MANIFEST

– litany: winter walk

In evergreens, wind-riven,
whose blaze-orange wounds
at limb and crown certify passion;
In the mitten-wool taste
of snow you scoop to your mouth
because – so you imagine – you thirst;
In illogical woodpeckers' laughter,
in their swooping flight,
that suggests assertion crossed by doubt;
In rough-frozen rims of tracks
the animals left in the dark preceding

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nights, whose meaning needs no glozing;
In the hue of a beech
– neither quite somber gray
nor placid blue – that teases all sight and belief;
In the way this sun at solstice
jumps up from the hill
and asks no reading, but affirmation in the chill;
In the ermine who fought the owl,
resisting negation:
alone now, scarlet in snow – conspicuous, stiffened;
In the steam of your coffee at dawn,
pale testimony to addiction, harmless,
perhaps more so than others you want;
In one long-damaged knee
whose cartilage resists your walk, and warns
against a mock-tranquility;
In the bland and sweet obedience
of your dogs, which raises questions
that touch on your worthiness, competence;
In the warmth (to which you'll return)
of shelter, so easily cancelled should your fuel
withhold its fire – a residue of the sun;

In fire, that has the power and glory
of "the things that have been made," as St. Paul saith,
commanding faith, however airy;
In warmth and shelter and fire,
to which of course you will return,
for which you are whetting desire;
In desire, whose quenching is life
and death, as poets used to say –
by enjoinder and designation: *husband, wife*;
In this cheery fall of siskins
to an earth that you'd thought barren: in their number,
that may be somewhere counted, their busy-ness;
In their vanishing
– before you can count them yourself –
that sermonizes vanity;
In the far waw of a power saw
that binds on a softwood's sap, congealed:
the logger swears profanely, we are not healed;

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In the warming recollection of your children,
for whose sake you pray as you can for death
to have no dominion, that you are forgiven.

Kay Ryan

IS IT MODEST?

Is it modest or arrogant
not to enter the scene;
instead to push a parrot
forward or make the air
apparent in the spring;
to press the whole embarrassment
of riches at us – bejeweling
every mean web, glazing water
in ditches; to divest yourself
upon us till every moth or hibiscus
or bottle fragment is some
aspect of your garment, some
hem to kiss; un-becoming on and on,
leaving us like this?

Nicholas Christopher

ROOFTOP

Across the street tonight
the snow is glazed fast
on the warehouse roof.

As if at any moment
a phalanx of skaters
might dart from the shadows

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of the water tower executing
perfect leaps, pirouettes
and figure-eights, etching

the ice with their intricate
designs until patterns emerge,
like maps (hopelessly over-
lapping) of their inner lives.

But, instead, dozens of pigeons,
their wings speckled
with moonlight, explode
from the clotted darkness

of the water tower, wheeling
into momentary formations
against the frozen sky,

where those of us quick enough
will read our futures:
the time and place of our deaths,

and even the dreams we'll dream
tonight, sharp gusts hissing
like blades across the window.

Bruce Smith

AMOR FATI: BECAUSE WE OWN NOTHING

Not these snappy new clothes, this bungalow, these slightly three-
dimensional forms we lease, then all property is theft
and all theft sorcery the way the shoes were lifted
from the bargain basement of Strawbridges men's haberdashery
and gift wrapped against the store detectives,
the goons, the stooges, my mother's enchanting invective
lifted me and made me go soft at the edges with the unseen
brogues so that I rose up the escalator

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and paid the subway to become the elevated before
I was fleshed again (my hands!) at the threshold of 3144
Meridian. And although I was naked inside them, I loved them
as I loved my fate which I believed was shiny
and rich as cordovan and exquisite (the envy) on the street
where hope mirrored truth from my wing tips to infinity
and I believed I could wear them and wear them
and not wear them out, these stiff new beliefs.

Harold Schimmel

I'M IN UNIFORM

from *Lowell*

I'm in uniform fresh from basic training Frank
all leanness of thighs moves to a bass-beat with a glass
of Jim Beam (his partner) on ice Edwin presents me
(this anonymous soldier) and we speak of a mutual philosopher-
friend's fairness and decency "And when he wants his boy"
O'Hara attacks . . . "Wham!" I come-to-after through splintery
  seconds of catching on deer
like river minnows nipping at my toes Jane Frielicher
descending her ladder smiles wily sexy and Frank
devotes himself to pulling at his absent dinner-tie
You in all of this are where? In the corner
in the Whistler's rocker – holding court with both
your hands heterosexual and learned . . . "ten dollars"
"car keys" and "thigh" in your poems were arranged with
Chardin-like precision or the floral exhibitions (set to the
    botanic-calendar) at the Isabel Gardiner Museum

Translated from the Hebrew by Peter Cole

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Nadya Aisenberg

NATURAL HISTORY

Before we became fossils
we were merely caricatures
hardening slowly inward from the rim
so that when light broke suddenly
through sodden clouds
it left no impression
just as earlier in the summer
we hadn't known how to fold in
the rainbows and luna moths,
clearly a visitation,
but just carried on talking.
Then snow fell on our still-green
branches and we understood,
shuddered and pressed against the rock
our perfect brutal place
and the flesh
in its soft petitioning was overthrown.

Snow lies between the birches
like silence in the shell of an imaginary egg
or the letters from the dead which are never delivered.
On the snow's crust glittering words
are sacrificed. Nothing can enter,
not moving sunligh and fresh water,
not even the frenzied bowing of strings
from the white woods of Shostakovitch.
Under them the maternal voice of silence
waits, intact,
and you and I are in it and of it
who had joyful hands and words like bread
we passed between us. We have become
the unaudible prayer of schist O ready
for a single skilled tap
from the mason's hand
to spring us without shatter.

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Don Share

GEORGE SANTAYANA REVISITED*

When he was old and ill and could not live alone
George Santayana was cared for by the Blue Nuns
On the Via Santo Stefano Rofundo,
An underliner of Céline, a doter of Franco.

"I confess that I don't like the Jewish
Spirit, because it is worldly, seeing
God in thrift and success." He spent hours
Trying to read Pound's savage handwriting.

Gone the piqué vest, kid gloves, and spats,
The Murillo madonna with mustaches
Watching football with a Greek perspective.
Blind as a bat, peering at paintings,

He had much to say about aesthetics.
He lived in a world full of rocks, trees, beasts,
Where his own thought was a form of life,
Its meaning a form of satisfaction, and order.

He made the world congenial to his interests.
"There is no God, and Mary is His mother,"
Said Russell of his valuation of religion.
But he searched for evidence that mountains and pencils,

We and our memories, and time, exist;
And for their "essences," in a leap of animal faith.
Hating the "promiscuous bipeds that now blacken the planet,"
He sympathized with Soviets, Fascists, Catholics,

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*Author's Note: In memory of Jonathan Lieberson, from whose essay, "The Sense of Santayana" the first line is quoted and material on G. S. derived.

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But not at all with liberals. "As far as deaths
And loss of capital, I don't care much.
The young men killed would grow older if they
Lived, and then they would be good for nothing."

A spiritual man, incapacitated for anything else.
"Like Christ" – like Oliver Alden – "who couldn't
Be a soldier or athlete or lover of women
Or father of a family . . . " A hero-worshipper

Without a hero, "Superior to his world,
But not up to his own standard," silent
For long seasons, "crushing all things
In his heart as in a wine press."

Robert Richman

THE EVENING SNOW

Had aged, to a blazing whiteness, the dark stubble
On the distant mountain's face; subdued, with high,
Impatient drifts, the creaking door of the barn;
And burdened the row of firs with quilts of ice.
Impulsively I walked toward a branch
To rid it of its silencing cocoon.
I swung in my backyard frigidarium.
The sleeping limb recoiled so fast I caught
A stinging blow to cheek and eye that said,
The vigor of spring still pulsated beneath
The glittering, decolorized display,
Undoing every bold unruly act.

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George Bradley

GREAT STONE FACE

Perhaps something ought to be said about how deadpan
It all is, your experience as it is called, although
It seems you are its, really, rather than vice versa;
How for all your convulsive sobbing, laughter and pity,
It never sheds a tear or tips a wink, never betrays
Even the merest flicker of amusement.
It's hard making your mind up without any hints,
And someone should say something about how you feel
You are never quite getting the point, about how
Every time the bucket plunges deeper down the well
To haul up the subtle something glittering there,
A pause for thought arrives to cancel understanding,
Make nonsense of your efforts at an accurate account.
Of course, it's just such uncertainty that makes us
What we are, just this tremendous reserve in things
That leads us to expect an object of our curiosity
And sets us sifting the air of spring afternoons
In search of whatever it could be that brings
The astonishing crocus to life beneath our feet
And splashes forsythia about in fauvist strokes.
The distance it all keeps is what keeps you looking
(Through language, through landscape's irregular grammar)
For what it is that enthralls you so, what it is
That draws you forth to shiver like the flowering leaves,
And that will someday put you down, an exhausted thing,
Will cast you back upon some inscrutable conclusion,
Letting you drop out of a vast indifference, out
Of some private dissatisfaction, releasing you one day
In an uneasy response all its own.

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Ben La Farge

WHAT BLOODCELLS UNDERSTAND

Slowly we learn what bloodcells understand:
Birth is the speech of seed, the still unknown,
But death is the oldest language of the land.

Amphibian wings, the ape's prehensile hand,
Flutter within our fingers' flesh and bone,
But slowly we learn what bloodcells understand:

City and dinosaur, buried beneath the sand,
Tell us in tongues of skeleton and of stone
Death is the oldest language of the land.

In kernel and egg and womb the seeds expand,
Bursting the husk, the shell, the liquid zone,
Till slowly we learn what bloodcells understand:

Death is the gift the gods of earth demand,
Speaking in tongues of fissure and of cone;
Death is the oldest language of the land.

Birth is the speech of trees before they stand,
The speech of seed before the root is grown,
But slowly we learn what bloodcells understand:
Death is the oldest language of the land.

Angela Ball

JAMAICA

I'm here the small hour
after a foursquare rain, water still
leaning in pools, light draining back
to the streets.
The Mood Club's like the inside

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of a hat oranged
with tropical dust, its rows
of rum bottles like the murk
of an old city. Jumpety table
made of old dark wood
for me to sit at and have
a bottle of Red Stripe.
There's something on the wall
behind me – spread thighs
framing my head, a mural of legs
scissored out so far the torso
attached to them seems broken
or sprung. Ashen patch
of dress, the rest
of the figure absent
or totally dark. A man
comes with dominos, rubs them face down
on the table, and I get mine –
my favorite the one with a single
dot, slow black in all the whiteness.
He shows my thumbs how to command them
all at once to make a fence. Already he's way ahead
of me, eating my plays
alive, clacking down
his last domino – all the time moving
back and forth from the game
to his shaved ice concession
across the street –
he sells most of the color
electric blue. I lay down
more dominos in a wide field
of split paths. "This one is rest,"
I say, "This one is sleep. Then love."
The man is silent, calm eyes.
He is the game. "Good shot" he says. There's ice
melting on the street: something glistening
into something dark.

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Robert B. Shaw

ADVANCED RESEARCH

A buzzer sounds. And now a voice, too bored
to reach for pleas or threats, broadcasts the same
old bulletin: the library will close
in fifteen minutes. I can hear a quickened
pummel of footsteps through the thin, rattling
ceiling, and I wonder what it is
holding me back from joining in that ratlike
scurry of desertion. Even more
pointedly, I wonder why I'm here.
This is a level of the stacks I've never
up to now been lost in – so far down
below ground it's in fact a sub-sub-basement.
Stingy luminosity meted out
by jittery ceiling tubes about to fail
helps even less than usual to scan
the titles mouldering on their metal shelves.

Really, it's like a mineshaft; I could use
one of those flashlight caps the miners wear,
I tell myself – when, sharply as a lightbulb
switching itself on, it comes to me:
the quest is at an end. Here in this section,
if I can only find it, is the book
I've been tracking for years, beginning seven flights up,
the book that waits to tell me everything
I'll ever need to know. It's worse than hopeless
without a call number; I'm about
to give it up when suddenly my eye
fixes on a particular cobwebbed spine.
Unbelievable luck – can it be trusted?
I pull it from its shadowed perch and turn
a flaking leather cover back, and find –
dust. The pages all have pulverized
like some poor pharaoh's mummy stripped
of grave-linen in a rough hunt for gems;
now at my feet a little heap of chaff

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is all this long-sought volume has to show,
except for the one smaller leaf laid in
as afterthought, printed apparently
on paper more enduring: the errata,
noted without apologies as follows:

For "inessential parts" *read* "in essential parts".
For "god" *read* "goad".
For "construction" read "constriction".
For "near" *read* "fear".
For "father" *read* "farther".

Settling now for anything, I pocket it.
I have five minutes left to make the door.

Jorge Teillier

AFTERNOON IN AUTOMOBILE

for my brother Ivan

We abandon the village
after drinking something in the hotel facing the square.
We choose the oldest road. We drive slowly
past untilled fields, trees disfigured
by the rasp of fire. We go onto an abandoned estate
to look for wild apples.
Then, someone says: "In the station there was a girl
who looked like I don't remember who."
Someone else starts to sing.
But when the stars come out to gaze at us
with their sad sheep's watery eyes
no one speaks or sings.
The old engine rattles, the wind hits us in the face,
one friend hands out the bread and wine. Always
that is good.
And it's good to want this to go on forever,
as we believe
go on the night, the wind, the dark roads of the sky.

Translated from the Spanish by Carolyne Wright

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Karen Wilkin

AT THE GALLERIES

Even by today's pluralistic standards, the past season was noticeably varied. A series of sculpture shows, for example, ranged from minimalism-with-a-difference to lush biomorphism, to elegant austerity, to grotesque modishness. They suggested that the constructed tradition of Picasso, González and their descendents is still healthy, and that so is the tradition of modelling and casting they rejected. So is the exploration of unexpected materials. So, alas, is kitsch. An equally wide-ranging group of painting exhibitions provided evidence that similar diversity of intent (and of result) prevails in other disciplines. There has been the usual crop of overblown and overrated shows, underrated ones, bores, disappointments and a few wonderful surprises, as well.

One of the surprises was the February exhibition by the Canadian sculptor André Fauteux, at 49th Parallel, in conjunction with his Toronto dealer, Gallery One. Fauteux, who used to exhibit fairly regularly in New York and was the recipient of a Greenburger award a few years ago, has not had a solo show here for ten years, so it was a particular pleasure to see his most recent work. Over the past fifteen years or so, Fauteux has developed an individual vocabulary based on apparently ideal geometric figures, warped or subtly nudged out of true. It's a legacy of his minimalist origins, but just when you think you have grasped the structural principles of one of Fauteux's pieces you discover something wholly unexpected. Symmetry turns out to be asymmetry; Euclidian-derived shapes turn out to be unnameable, invented configurations. And so on.

In the past, Fauteux often took as his starting point found objects that puzzled or challenged him: odd shapes left over from cut-outs, insistent drums, complex solids of obscure function. He could usually transform these uncompromising fragments and make them take their places within his sculptures, but recently, he had begun to feel constrained, rather than provoked, by ready-made elements. As well, a series of sojourns in Spain, mostly in Catalonia, in the last few years, brought new influences into play, mainly architecture, in the form of the Romanesque churches of the region, and the powerful tradition of Catalan ironwork. Explicit notions of interior and exterior, translated into sculptural, as opposed to architectural terms, began to preoccupy him, along with equally explicit notions about making and shaping, as opposed to selecting and placing.

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Niagara Region Variation #2 (1989) by André Fauteux. 42" x 55" x 53". Brass and corten. Courtesy of Gallery One.

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Three Half a Crowns (1989) by Lee Tribe. 4" x 5 and 1/2" x 5". Welded steel. Courtesy of Victoria Munroe Gallery.

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The pieces shown at 49th Parallel demonstrated Fauteux's most recent response to these ideas. Several were snubnosed, truncated "arches," like apses sliced and wedged back together at unexpected angles, to partially enclose and define mysterious, charged spaces. From some views the dark, rounded interiors were visible, while from others, the viewer was excluded. The pieces were too small to be enterable, yet they were as much about place as they were about object, calling up associations of dim votive spaces and smooth exterior walls.

The most difficult work in the show and very likely the best was a kind of oversized "basket," a gathering of chest-high plates of steel bound together rather haphazardly with brass. The piece was, at once, all exterior, all container, and all potent void. Fauteux's inclusion of shiny brass in other pieces risked looking artful, but in the basket it made sense, a tense strapping that held everything in place. Fauteux has been worth keeping an eye on for some time. His new work makes this truer than ever.

Another pleasurable surprise was provided by Lee Tribe's show of rather atypical (and very good) sculpture at Victoria Munroe Gallery, at about the same time as the Fauteux exhibit. Tribe, a British emigré, increasingly visible in this country, served an apprenticeship to relatively orthodox contruction in steel, first becoming known for delicate curvilinear structures, but for the past few years he has been assembling objects that have as much to do with African fetishes as they have to do with, say, González. (They often recall David Smith in his kinkier moments, though.) Tribe's growing interest in mass, as opposed to openness, led him to treat his linear structures as armatures, wrapping them in lengths of chain and loading them to make extraordinarily dense, spiny and slightly threatening objects. Although Tribe was clearly interested in an almost monolitic bulk, he continued to use the small increments of his lyrical works to build up masses, sometimes to the detriment of the finished pieces. He was aware of the problem, yet seemed uncertain of what to do about it. "Then," as he puts it, "it struck me."

An accident in the studio last summer forced Tribe to work at near-miniature scale, sitting at a bench, for several weeks. Ironically, the taut, small-scale pieces he produced are among his most monumental works to date. The best seem enormous. As a group, they are refreshingly direct and often quite fierce, and the effect of a room full of these pugilistic little objects, many of them in size and form like clenched fists, handsomely arranged on long, multi-level tables, was startling. Some of their power comes from the exceptionally clear relation of their parts, some from the tightness of the contours in the best of them. The robustness of these pieces is all the more surprising, given their jewelry-like scale. If Tribe can carry this over to his

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larger works without reverting to the wiriness that sometimes plagued him, he will be making the best sculpture of his life.

Both Isaac Witkin and Michael Steiner have also changed their ways of working quite dramatically in the past several years. Steiner, who had spent about a decade working in bronze, constructing sinewy "cages" and complex arrangements of slung forms that suggested both architectural vaulting and reclining figures, began to work in steel. Witkin, who was an accomplished steel sculptor, known for shambling planar structures that progressed from event to event, began casting in bronze. Steiner, after years of working with sheets and slabs of wax, seemed to delight in the crispness and firmness of steel, while Witkin, who was capable of putting steel through some pretty complicated paces, reveled in bronze's unpredictability, its ability to flow. The two sculptors' exhibitions this spring made it clear that each has come to terms with his new medium.

Witkin's recent bronzes, shown by Patricia Hamilton at 112 Greene Street Gallery in May, were provoked by a version of the legend of the wizard, Merlin, who is supposed, at the end of his life, to have returned his knowledge to nature, in the person of a delicious nymph. Not that you need to know this. Witkin's generous, gently swelling forms, piled into pyramids, stretched upwards or delicately interlocked, evoke growth and the natural world quite independently. They evoke, too, a kind of crustacean 1940s biomorphism I associate with certain works by David Smith (among others), notably the Specters and the occasional cast piece. Witkin's spiky organic forms seem slightly *retarditaire*, which may be part of their charm. There's also something curious about seeing vast dollops of metal, their shapes clearly determined by a molten state, prancing effortlessly in space. The series is clearly a *tour de force* and, at the same time, a little uncomfortable, which may, like the retro quality, be part of the point. I liked *Hawthorne Tree II* best, with its poised and cantilevered forms rearing up playfully, but I preferred to any of the large, ambitious pieces two slightly earlier works towards the back of the gallery, built of subtly inflected, narrow "leaves" of metal that seemed to drift spontaneously into position. The more open of the two, like a momentary joining of elements, may have been the best piece in the show. In general, though, all the works in the exhibition, with their clear profiles and beautifully modulated patinas, seemed to me Witkin's most focused and concentrated to date.

Michael Steiner's initial steel sculptures, while possessed of the clear-headedness and lucidity that characterize his work, whatever the medium, were less personal than the bronzes that had preceded them. His most recent work, shown at Salander-O'Reilly Galleries in May, are, to my eye, the first of his steel pieces to equal the inventiveness of what came before. Yes, I

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Passage (for Andrei Sakharov) by Michael Steiner. (1989) Bronze. 106" x 98" x 74". Courtesy of Salander-O'Reilly Galleries.

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Silent Pier (1989) by Paul Resika. Oil on canvas. 63 and 5/8" x 51 and 5/8". Courtesy of Graham Modern.

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know the medium is listed as bronze. The sculptures are built in steel, then fabricated in bronze, because while Steiner values the structural possibilities of steel, he values even more highly the surface and color of bronze. The frequent use of curving, light-diffusing forms in these recent works, I suspect, has to do with his knowledge of the sculptures' eventual material.

The best works were the most economical and, at the same time, the most aggressive, formally – for lack of a better word. The low, crouching blocky structure, *The Bull*, with its seductive, warm patina, seemed to carry with it the memory of a confining cube, boldly sliced, pared away and penetrated. Its generous arches, cylinders and plates appeared to grab and charge a chunk of space, not merely to occupy it. The large *Passage (for Andrei Sakharov)* was similar in spirit, but looser, like a struggle between a cube and a sphere that has resulted in the virtual destruction of both forms. *Passage* seemed a little bony, skeletal, compared to *The Bull*; the greater thickness of component parts, in the smaller piece, was beneficial.

Steiner's smaller sculptures were generally chunkier than his large ones, which subverted some of their innate refinement and added a helpful toughness. *Minimum Wheel* was one of the best, with its implications of measurement and comparison, of the play of like against almost-like and void against almost-solid. It was comparable to *The Bull* in its four-square economy. A wonderful, sturdy little piece, *Horizontal Lid*, was like an homage to González's celebrated *Head, called "The Tunnel,"* with the thinness and fragility of González's sculpture translated into Steiner's language of cool geometry and elegant restraint. "Elegance" and "restraint" are key words in discussing Steiner. Much of his best work treads a delicate line between refinement and free-wheeling invention. When Steiner fails, his work can appear cautious and over-finished, but when he succeeds, as he clearly does in the best of his recent work, he manages to transcend any such considerations and produce sculptures of astonishing fineness, limpidity and unexpectedness.

Bryan Hunt, whose bronzes, like frozen waterfalls, won him considerable attention in the past few years, showed mixed media, ephemeral-appearing works at Blum Helman Gallery in May. Unless I am confusing Hunt with someone else, the forms of these delicate constructions, like attenuated airplane fuselages, harked back to his own earlier concerns. Individually, the flimsy structures, light shining through their papery surfaces, frail struts making their presence felt through the skin, were quite appealing. They have strong associations with canoes, with their elegant ribs, or early airplanes, held together with baling wire and glue, and the (literal) twist Hunt gives these allusions is often extremely effective. But the relentless sameness of size, length, proportion and the height at which the works were mounted undermined rather than accentuated their individuality and trivialized the

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conception. The sense of "madeness" of the pieces, along with their uniform smallness and slimness, turned them into models, rather than ends in themselves, and craft, rather than sculpture, came to the fore. A single bronze, like a doubled-back version of the "fuselage-wing" pieces, turned vertically, was similarly small and polite, and seemed precious, rather than intimate. The constructed forms, with their fragile skeletons and subtly colored, translucent skins, have enormous possibilties, but Hunt, unfortunately, seems to have backed away from them, at least for the moment.

William Boepple's retrospective exhibition at Bennington College's Susan Lemburg Usdan Gallery in April spanned twenty years. It was fascinating to see Boepple's steel constructions of the 1970s, when he was much influenced by Caro, together with the quirky wood and steel sculptures he has been making for about the past five years. I've written here before of my enthusiam for Boepple's recent "ladder" sculptures, pared down to pylon-like drawing or loaded and fattened almost to the point of losing the generating form. The most recent ladders are the most audacious yet, dissected and reassembled. Some become virtually anthropomorphic, without losing either their essential abstractness or their resemblance to everyday, vernacular objects; they engage in surprising acrobatics, waving schematic limbs in the air and balancing their fellows aloft. Seeing these together with the steel pieces revealed unexpected likenesses between them, but also made it clear that Boepple's recent work is his most personal and most provocative.

There isn't much to be said about Julian Schnabel's show of three-dimensional objects at the elegant new Pace gallery downtown. There's a little of everything – wall reliefs, monoliths, complex assemblages. The wall pieces, described by one reviewer as "so resonant with emotion that they could be a postmodern version of the Medicis' last resting place," are both portentous and pretentious. As for the rest, if you happened on Schnabel's vaguely Oceanic trifles in an airport gift shop, made of cheap materials at knick-knack scale you would have dismissed them as unappetizing *tchatchkas* and deplored the erosion of culture that produced them. Schnabel, however, has the means to realize his Trader Vic's fantasies at monumental size, in bronze. These were combined with amphorae of recent vintage, placed on tables with bases equally fraught with references and the whole ensemble, apparently, taken quite seriously. I suppose it was no more empty or talentless than Schnabel's painting show, earlier this year – although, at the time, I thought that represented a new low – but I found it more offensive, perhaps because more effort had gone into producing such schlock. Two thoughts: just because something is large, free-standing and useless doesn't mean that it is sculpture and, if our society really credits such dispiriting stuff with aesthetic value, things are worse than I feared.

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Some of the painting exhibitions this spring offered some reassurance. Paul Resika, at Graham Modern in March, and Robert Berlind, at Ruth Siegel in April, made it clear that it is still possible to paint figuratively, without gimmicks, appropriation or irony, and end up with pictures that seem relevant and arresting. Resika's simplified views of a pier in Provincetown and Berlind's elongated groves of trees were very specific, but only nominally about their presumed subjects. Instead, they were about the tradition of painting and the power of pigment on canvas to stir us.

Resika's main theme was a group of waterfront buildings, rendered from viewpoints that varied only minutely. (I kept thinking of Morandi's rows of bottles and boxes.) The tall dockside structures were instantly recognizable, but neutralized, like Morandi's domestic bric-a-brac, so that intense but atmospheric color took over and buildings, sky and water existed primarily as brushy, colored planes. It's neither figuration disguised as abstraction nor the reverse, but simply intelligent, economical use of a configuration thoroughly familiar to the painter, yet still provocative to him. The cumulative effect of Resika's series was perhaps even stronger than that of any single picture, since I found myself checking each work against the others, to see just what the painter had done, how each image had been altered. The pictures with least anecdotal detail came off best, probably because they made it most apparent that Resika trusted his sense of touch and color to carry the burden of his perceptions, but in general, the pleasure afforded by these solid, tightly focused works was considerable.

Berlind has been painting "portraits" of trees since he spent a year near an ancient oak forest in Provence. Back in the United States, he has continued to explore the motif, substituting a very American sense of vastness for the intimacy of his French pictures. In the latter, which seemed to nod at both Courbet and Constable, Berlind confronted us with dense, contorted limbs and massive trunks, seen from impossible viewpoints, as though we were hovering in the air at the level where branches started. His recent American pictures place the viewer at the bottom of groves of tall, slender trees, looking up, head tilted back so far that all sense of the ground plane is lost. Often, he accentuates this effect of disequilibrium by placing the image on a tall, narrow canvas, squeezing the field of vision still further. The most successful painting in the show, however, was large and squarish, so that image and shape were at odds with one another. The cool, autumnal light of this picture, too, was less immediately ingratiating than the glorious effects of some others, while rough, rapid paint handling also separated it from its fellows. I was told that this was the most recent work in the show, which was good news.

By subverting his own strategies, Berlind ended up making a far

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stronger and less predictable image. His most successful pictures, in the past, have often exploited this kind of contradiction; a series of florid sunsets, over the less lovely parts of New Jersey, painted a few years ago, tested an almost nineteenth-century notion of nature as sublime and transcendent against the realities of the waterfront fringes of New York in the late twentieth century. They were first-rate, and the best of the paintings of tall groves deal with a similar tension between an inherited, idealized conception of nature and the facts of observed actuality, freely and loosely rendered, with broad passages of scumbled color suggesting, rather than depicting, telling details.

April Gornik's canvases, seen at Edward Thorp Gallery in April and May, depended upon related ideas, but they were more wholeheartedly committed to the Sublime. She paints operatic meteorological effects, apocalyptic skies and last trumpet effects of light. The most convincing pictures, however, seem the most evidently invented and, at the same time, the most deadpan. An image of a drowned formal landscape, a kind of dream park, with symmetrical, if improbable allées, is one of Gornik's most compelling. The insistent rows of trees and their repeated reflections in the surface of the water carry us into and across the picture and, coincidentally, solve any problems of composition and distribution of color. Other less stylized images with more overt drama risk flying apart. Gornik is a tonal painter rather than a colorist, and she's best when she stays nearly monochromatic, as in the brooding, dark *Brunhildes Wahl*, with its looming funnel of cloud and its ambiguous, silhouetted "haystacks." (It's like a Monet of the end of the world.) Gornik is obviously willing to risk calendar-art sentimentality, in order to try for the kind of all-stops-out cosmic drama she wishes to evoke, but her recent pictures suggest that she is best when she exercises more restraint, in terms of subject and of structure.

Archie Rand's April exhibition at Scott Hanson Gallery was in quite a different vein than Resika's, Berlind's, or Gornik's and in quite a different vein, too, than his own work of the past few years. Rand has been exploring visual languages, from the most commonplace to the most rarefied, loading his pictures with disparate images ranging from cartoon figures to ravishing expanses of "pure" painting. Sometimes it seemed as though he were seeing just how outrageous the combinations could be before the picture fell apart, while at others, he appeared to be stretching the limits of visual associativeness. He always seemed willing to risk disaster – or perhaps he invited it. I've often found myself interested in what Rand was up to, stimulated and challenged by it, even when I didn't like it.

Rand's recent works are sparer and cleaner than they have been for some time, with color limited to black and white and imagery stripped down to a minimum. Many of the new works are extremely large, almost to the

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The Vernal Equinox (1989) by April Gornik. Oil on linen. 77" x 106". Courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery.

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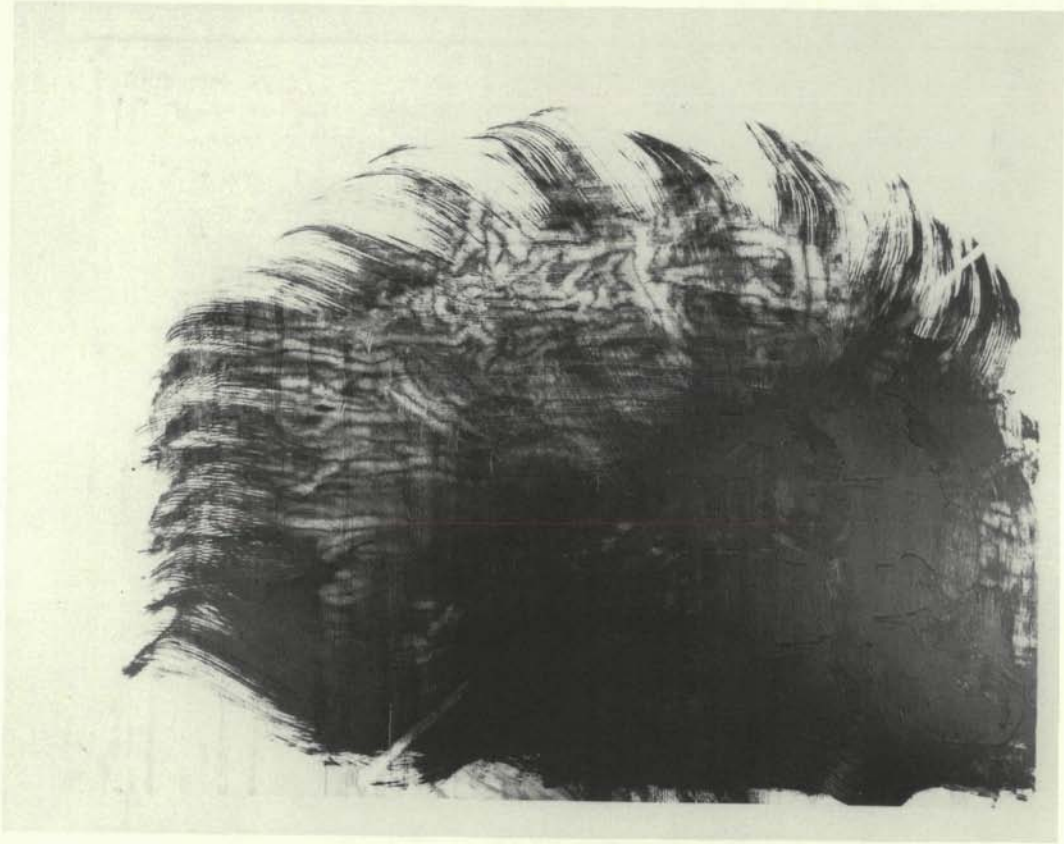

Wood (1990) by Archie Rand. Acrylic on canvas. 108" x 141". Courtesy of Scott Hanson Gallery.

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point of bombast, but most of the time Rand, who has done a number of commissioned murals, gets away with it. The best pictures were the most about *painting*, in a way that could be described as the undoing of parody. Rand takes the "cool," detached, mechanical look of modish, ironic abstraction and translates it back into "real" hand-painted painting. Rand's colleagues often take the passionate gestures and sensuous surfaces of an earlier generation and turn them into something that looks like photomechanical reproduction – *pace*, Walter Benjamin – and Rand could be said to "reappropriate" them. It's an odd idea, rescuing the threatened species of straight painting from the bugbear of cynicism, if indeed, this is part of Rand's program. (He sometimes seems influenced by Sigmar Polke, who occasionally appears to celebrate the means of "straight painting" in spite of himself.) Is it enough? When it works, yes.

Rand's best pictures opposed all-over repeated patterns or illusionistic textures, perhaps intended as homage to the Color Field painters and others whom he admires, with more or less specific images. A vast expanse of black and white pattern had equal associations of tribal mud cloth and the checkered background of Matisse's wonderful *Pink Nude*, in the Cone Collection. An atmosphere drift of "curtain" was the lushest passage in the whole picture. The similarly constructed *Rest* juxtaposed a white-on-gray checkerboard, a brushy "wing," and a huge, fragmenting laurel wreath. The picture was chiefly about the play of varying densities and textures, about crisp definitions and blurs. The images functioned as just another set of variables, evocative, but no more important than *how* they were painted. (Several pictures that included hex-sign-like roundels suffered because they lacked the unity of means and image of pictures like *Rest*; the images seemed both gratuitous and expediently depicted.) Perhaps the most absorbing picture in the show was a large, squarish horizontal canvas covered with overscaled white-on-white woodgraining, partially veiled by feathery black overpainting. It was redolent of Cubist collage, Georges Braque's late, vast monochromatic *Studios* and, at the same time, Abstract Expressionist gesture, among other things. It was Rand at his best, commenting on painting *by* painting, not by depicting or illustrating. It made me intensely curious about what he will do next.

The spring season ended with the temporary concurrence of exhibitions by two non-American painters who now enjoy superstar status, Anselm Kiefer and Francis Bacon. Anselm Kiefer's current group of monumental works occupied both halves of Marian Goodman Gallery through the middle of June (and caused her to take down the previous exhibit almost a week earlier than announced), while the Bacon retrospective, organized by the Hirshhorn Museum and already seen elsewhere, will be at the Museum of

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Modern Art all summer, with a complementary show at Marlborough Gallery.

The Kiefers were predictably theatrical and immense, calculated to impress as much by their sheer size as by their Great Themes – this time, the Caballah, with a little of the Apocrypha and, of course, the Holocaust. There was the usual overscaled portrait of a man-made structure, rendered in academic perspective against a textured ground, and a series said to be about Lilith, Adam's first wife (a difficult woman), and her demon children. These were symbolized by crude clothing, hanks of hair, barbed wire, model airplanes, and the kind of wire clothes hangers you get from the dry cleaner, all coated with ash. Get it? The clothing is made, apparently, to Mr. Keifer's own design and comes in sizes ranging from adult to doll. It's about as convincing as Ralph Lauren, but with more guilt.

The single construction in the show, an enormous, ramshackle scaffold-like bookcase, burdened by schematic volumes of folded lead sheets, with a spill of broken glass on the floor below, did everything the paintings failed to do. I am not sure about the lateral extensions, but that's a quibble. The contrast of brutal timbers, beautiful lead, and fragile shards was eloquent. The piece was powerful and thought-provoking, with inevitable associations of violence, of book-burning and *Kristallnacht*, and much more. It was difficult to believe that this rich, provocative object was made by the same person as the high-style, ash-encrusted canvases, with their calculated references to horrors, sanitized, tamed and made elegant.

I suppose Bacon's work could be described similarly, even though his avowed intent, according to a much-quoted text panel that begins his exhibition, is to make an equivalent, on canvas, for the way we perceive reality. "What I want to do is to distort the thing far beyond the appearance, but in the distortion to bring it back to a recording of the appearance," Bacon says. "In trying to do a portrait, my ideal would really be just to pick up a handful of paint and throw it at the canvas and hope that the portrait was there." But for all the drips and clots, for all the smears and "distortions," the cumulative effect of the fifty-nine paintings spanning forty-odd years, in the retrospective, is of extraordinary and conventional facility, academic bravura and nastiness served up with immense good taste. There's also a great impression of sameness.

Bacon's style, his way of composing and even the size and proportion of his canvases was pretty well fixed by the 1960s and since then, his pictures have been put together according to a formula: smooth ground, schematic tipped space, with a platform or enclosing box, usually outlined, and a figure or figures, centralized, as often as not. When you come upon a rare composition that breaks this mold, it seems like a masterwork. Bacon's few

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early pieces in the show, while subject to more variation, nonetheless adhere to known conventions of 1930s Surrealism, via Picasso. Unlike Kiefer's cosmic horror, Bacon's domain is domestic horror, suggested by his rendering the human face and figure as though they were melting or mutilated. In one of the early paintings, a plucked chicken with a toothy mouth, stretched in what will become a signature rictus, seems to have provided Bacon with an archetype for human anatomy that has lasted to the present. In paintings from the sixties on, violence is signalled by overpainting and smudging of faces and bodies, while background details, such as the ubiquitous light bulb, remain intact and respectfully rendered. Arrows tell us where the significant bits are.

There's little sign of evolution. Later Bacons get more schematic and cartoon-like, until by the 1980s, they suggest a Walt Disney version of de Kooning. In general, the quality of the paintings hardly supports the exalted claims made for Bacon – a catalogue essay by the distinguished and otherwise admirable scholar, Lawrence Gowing, comparing him to the most eminent of the old masters, is typical – but if the paintings fail to be stirring, formally, neither is the imagery startling. Even the naked men, engaged in what are usually private activities, seem artful and tasteful. It all seems, somehow, very British, like the national fondness for official institutions and scatalogical humor. The strongest impression left by the show is of extraordinary pomposity and pretentiousness: all those big gold frames and the insistence, in the titles, that these highly finished, large, signed, expensively presented commodities are merely humble "studies" for something else.

The summer season promises to be an exciting one in New York. In July, the overlap of two splendid exhibitions, *Matisse in Morocco* at The Museum of Modern Art and *The Russian Taste in French Painting*, at the Metropolitan, will make it possible to see an extraordinary selection of first-rate Matisses, usually housed in Moscow and Leningrad – to say nothing of the delights of the Matisse exhibition, in general, which reunited the spectacular paintings and drawings done on the artist's extended stays in Tangier in 1912 and 1913, or the joys of seeing the Poussins, Bonnards, Cézannes and other gems in the Russian show. The Whitney Museum will be offering a long overdue retrospective of Hans Hofmann, following a fine view of the intimate watercolors and canvases of the pioneer modernist from Boston, Maurice Prendergast, while the Brooklyn Museum will be showing Edouard Vuillard's "Intimate Interiors." (Just ignore the psychological effusions of the text panels and use your eyes.)

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Marianna De Marco Torgovnick

ON BEING WHITE, FEMALE, AND BORN IN BENSONHURST

The Mafia protects the neighborhood, our fathers say, with that peculiar satisfied pride with which law-abiding Italian-Americans refer to the Mafia: the Mafia protects the neighborhood from "the coloreds." In the fifties and sixties, I heard that information repeated, in whispers, in neighborhood parks and in the yard at school in Bensonhurst. The same information probably passes today in the parks (the word now "blacks," not "coloreds") but perhaps no longer in the schoolyards. From buses each morning, from neighborhoods outside Bensonhurst, spill children of all colors and backgrounds – American black, West-Indian black, Hispanic, and Asian. But the blacks are the only ones especially marked for notice. Bensonhurst is no longer entirely protected from "the coloreds." But in a deeper sense, at least for Italian-Americans, Bensonhurst never changes.

Italian-American life continues pretty much as I remember it. Families with young children live side by side with older couples whose children are long gone to the suburbs. Many of those families live "down the block" from the last generation or, sometimes still, live together with parents or grandparents. When a young family leaves, as sometimes happens, for Long Island or New Jersey or (very common now) for Staten Island, another arrives, without any special effort being required, from Italy or a poorer neighborhood in New York. They fill the neat but anonymous houses that make up the mostly tree-lined streets: two-, three-, or four-family houses for the most part (this is a working, lower to middle-middle class area, and people need rents to pay mortgages), with a few single family or small apartment houses tossed in at random. Tomato plants, fig trees, and plaster madonnas often decorate small but well-tended yards which face out onto the street; the grassy front lawn, like the grassy backyard, is relatively uncommon.

Crisscrossing the neighborhood and marking out ethnic zones – Italian, Irish, and Jewish, for the most part, though there are some Asian-Americans and some people (usually Protestants) called simply Americans – are the great shopping streets: 86th Street, Kings Highway, Bay Parkway, 18th Avenue, each with its own distinctive character. On 86th Street, crowds

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bustle along sidewalks lined with ample, packed fruit stands. Women wheeling shopping carts or baby strollers check the fruit carefully, piece by piece, and often bargain with the dealer, cajoling for a better price or letting him know that the vegetables, this time, aren't up to snuff. A few blocks down the fruit stands are gone and the streets are lined by clothing and record shops, mobbed by teenagers. Occasionally, the El rumbles overhead, a few stops out of Coney Island on its way to the city, a trip of around one hour.

On summer nights, neighbors congregate on stoops which during the day serve as play yards for children. Air conditioning exists everywhere in Bensonhurst, but people still sit outside in the summer – to supervise children, to gossip, to stare at strangers. "Buona sera," I say, or "Buona notte," as I am ritually presented to Sal and Lily and Louie, the neighbors sitting on the stoop. "Grazie," I say when they praise my children or my appearance. It's the only time I use Italian, which I learned at high school, although my parents (both second generation Italian-Americans, my father Sicilian, my mother Calabrian) speak it at home to each other but never to me or my brother. My accent is the Tuscan accent taught at school, not the southern Italian accents of my parents and the neighbors.

It's important to greet and please the neighbors; any break in this decorum would seriously offend and aggrieve my parents. For the neighbors are the stern arbiters of conduct in Bensonhurst. Does Mary keep a clean house? Did Gina wear black long enough after her mother's death? Was the food good at Tony's wedding? The neighbors know and pass judgement. Any news of family scandal (my brother's divorce, for example) provokes from my mother the agonized words: "But what will I *tell* people?" I sometimes collaborate in devising a plausible script.

A large sign on the church I attended as a child sums up for me the ethos of Bensonhurst. The sign urges contributions to the church building fund with the message, in huge letters: "EACH YEAR ST. SIMON AND JUDE SAVES THIS NEIGHBORHOOD ONE MILLION DOLLARS IN TAXES." Passing the church on the way from largely Jewish and middle-class Sheepshead Bay (where my in-laws live) to Bensonhurst, year after year, my husband and I look for the sign and laugh at the crass level of its pitch, its utter lack of attention to things spiritual. But we also understand *exactly* the values it represents.

In the summer of 1989, my parents were visiting me at my house in Durham, North Carolina from the apartment in Bensonhurst where they have lived since 1942: three small rooms, rent-controlled, floor clean enough to eat off, every corner and crevice known and organized. My parents' longevity in a single apartment is unusual even for Bensonhurst, but not that unusual; many people live for decades in the same place or move within a

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ten-block radius. When I lived in this apartment, there were four rooms; one has since been ceded to a demanding landlord, one of the various landlords who have haunted my parents' life and must always be appeased lest the ultimate threat – removal from the rent-controlled apartment – be brought into play. That summer, during their visit, on August 23rd (my younger daughter's birthday) a shocking, disturbing, news report issued from the neighborhood: it had become another Howard Beach.

Three black men, walking casually through the streets at night, were attacked by a group of whites. One was shot dead, mistaken, as it turned out, for another black youth who was dating a white, although part-Hispanic, girl in the neighborhood. It all made sense: the crudely protective men, expecting to see a black arriving at the girl's house and overreacting; the rebellious girl dating the outsider boy; the black dead as a sacrifice to the feelings of the neighborhood.

I might have felt outrage, I might have felt guilt or shame, I might have despised the people among whom I grew up. In a way I felt all four emotions when I heard the news. I expect that there were many people in Bensonhurst who felt the same rush of emotions. But mostly I felt that, given the set-up, this was the only way things could have happened. I detested the racial killing; but I also understood it. Those streets, which should be public property available to all, belong to the neighborhood. All the people sitting on the stoops on August 23rd knew that as well as they knew their own names. The black men walking through probably knew it too – though their casual walk sought to deny the fact that, for the neighbors, even the simple act of blacks walking through the neighborhood would be seen as invasion.

Italian-Americans in Bensonhurst are notable for their cohesiveness and provinciality; the slightest pressure turns those qualities into prejudice and racism. Their cohesiveness is based on the stable economic and ethical level that links generation to generation, keeping Italian-Americans in Bensonhurst and the Italian-American community alive as the Jewish-American community of my youth is no longer alive. (Its young people routinely moved to the suburbs or beyond, and were never replaced, so that Jews in Bensonhurst today are almost all very old people.) Their provinciality results from the Italian-Americans' devotion to jealous distinctions and discriminations. Jews are suspect, but (the old Italian women admit) "they make good husbands." The Irish are okay, fellow Catholics, but not really "like us"; they make bad husbands because they drink and gamble. Even Italians come in varieties by region (Sicilian, Calabrian, Neapolitan, very rarely any region further north), and by history in this country (the newly arrived and ridiculed "gaffoon" versus the second or third generation.)

Bensonhurst is a neighborhood dedicated to believing that its values are

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the only values; it tends towards certain forms of inertia. When my parents visit me in Durham, they routinely take chairs from the kitchen and sit out on the lawn in front of the house, not on the chairs on the back deck; then they complain that the streets are too quiet. When they walk around my neighborhood (these De Marcos who have friends named Travaglianti and Occhipinti), look at the mailboxes and report that my neighbors have strange names. Prices at my local supermarket are compared, in unbelievable detail, with prices on 86th Street. Any rearrangement of my kitchen since their last visit is registered and criticized. Difference is not only unwelcome, it is unacceptable. One of the most characteristic things my mother ever said was in response to my plans for renovating my house in Durham. When she heard my plans, she looked around, crossed her arms, and said, "If it was me, I wouldn't change nothing." My father once asked me to level with him about a Jewish boyfriend who lived in a different part of the neighborhood, reacting to his Jewishness, but even more to the fact that he often wore Bermuda shorts: "Tell me something, Marianna. Is he a Communist?" Such are the standards of normality and political thinking in Bensonhurst.

I often think that one important difference between Italian-Americans in New York neighborhoods like Bensonhurst and Italian-Americans elsewhere is that the others moved on – to upstate New York, to Pennsylvania, to the Midwest. Though they frequently settled in communities of fellow Italians, they did move on. Bensonhurst Italian-Americans seem to have felt that one large move, over the ocean, was enough. Future moves could be only local: from the Lower East Side, for example, to Brooklyn, or from one part of Brooklyn to another. Bensonhurst was for many of these people the summa of expectations. If their America were to be drawn as a *New Yorker* cover, Manhattan itself would be tiny in proportion to Bensonhurst, and to its satellites, Staten Island, New Jersey, and Long Island.

"Oh, no," my father says when he hears the news about the shooting. Though he still refers to blacks as "coloreds," he's not really a racist and is upset that this innocent youth was shot in his neighborhood. He has no trouble acknowledging the wrongness of the death. But then, like all the news accounts, he turns to the fact, repeated over and over, that the blacks had been on their way to look at a used car when they encountered the hostile mob of whites. The explanation is right before him but, "Yeah," he says, still shaking his head, "yeah, but what were they *doing* there? They didn't belong."

Over the next few days, the television news is even more disturbing. Rows of screaming Italians, lining the streets, most of them looking like my relatives. I focus especially on one woman who resembles almost completely my mother: stocky but not fat, mid-seventies but well-preserved, full face

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showing only minimal wrinkles, ample steel-gray hair neatly if rigidly coiffed in a modified beehive hairdo left over from the sixties. She shakes her fist at the camera, protesting the arrest of the Italian-American youths in the neighborhood and the incursion of more blacks into the neighborhood, protesting the shooting. I look a little nervously at my mother (the parent I resemble), but she has not even noticed the woman and stares impassively at the television.

What has Bensonhurst to do with what I teach today and write? Why did I need to write about this killing in Bensonhurst, but not in the manner of a news account or a statistical sociological analysis? Within days of hearing the news, I began to plan this essay, to tell the world what I knew, even though I was aware that I could publish the piece only some place my parents or their neighbors would never see or hear about it. I sometimes think that I looked around from my baby carriage and decided that someday, the sooner the better, I would get out of Bensonhurst. Now, much to my surprise, Bensonhurst – the antipodes of the intellectual life I sought, the least interesting of places – had become a respectable intellectual topic. People would be willing to hear about Bensonhurst – and all by the dubious virtue of a racial killing in the streets.

The story as I would have to tell it would be to some extent a class narrative: about the difference between working class and upper middle class, dependence and a profession, Bensonhurst and a posh suburb. But I need to make it clear that I do not imagine myself as writing from a position of enormous self-satisfaction, or even enormous distance. You can take the girl out of Bensonhurst (that much is clear); but you may not be able to take Bensonhurst out of the girl. And upward mobility is not the essence of the story, though it is an important marker and symbol.

In Durham today, I live in a twelve-room house, surrounded by an acre of trees. When I sit on my back deck, on summer evenings, no houses are visible through the trees. I have a guaranteed income, teaching English at an excellent university, removed by my years of education from the fundamental economic and social conditions of Bensonhurst. The one time my mother ever expressed pleasure at my work was when I got tenure, what my father still calls, with no irony intended, "ten years." "What does that mean?" my mother asked when she heard the news. Then she reached back into her experience as a garment worker, subject to periodic lay-offs. "Does it mean they can't fire you just for nothing and can't lay you off?" When I said that was exactly what it means, she said, "Very good. Congratulations. That's *wonderful*." I was free from the *padrones*, from the network of petty anxieties that had formed, in large part, her very existence. Of course, I wasn't really free of petty anxieties: would my salary increase keep pace

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with my colleagues', how would my office compare, would this essay be accepted for publication, am I happy? The line between these worries and my mother's is the line between the working class and the upper middle class.

But getting out of Bensonhurst never meant to me a big house, or nice clothes, or a large income. And it never meant feeling good about looking down on what I left behind or hiding my background. Getting out of Bensonhurst meant freedom – to experiment, to grow, to change. It also meant knowledge in some grand, abstract way. All the material possessions I have acquired, I acquired simply along the way – and for the first twelve years after I left Bensonhurst, I chose to acquire almost nothing at all. Now, as I write about the neighborhood, I recognize that although I've come far in physical and material distance, the emotional distance is harder to gauge. Bensonhurst has everything to do with who I am and even with what I write. Occasionally I get reminded of my roots, of their simultaneously choking and nutritive power.

Scene one: It's after a lecture at Duke, given by a visiting professor from Princeton. The lecture was long and a little dull and – bad luck – I had agreed to be one of the people having dinner with the lecturer afterwards. We settle into our table at the restaurant: this man, me, the head of the Comparative Literature program (also a professor of German) and a couple I like who teach French – the husband at my university, the wife at one nearby. The conversation is sluggish, as it often is when a stranger, like the visiting professor, has to be assimilated into a group, so I ask the visitor from Princeton a question to personalize things a bit. "How did you get interested in what you do? What made you become a professor of German?" The man gets going and begins talking about how it was really unlikely that he, a nice Jewish boy from Bensonhurst, would have chosen, in the midfifties, to study German. Unlikely indeed.

I remember seeing *Judgment at Nuremberg* in a local movie theater and having a woman in the row in back of me get hysterical when some clips of a concentration camp were shown; "My God," she screamed in a European accent, "Look at what they did. Murderers, MURDERERS!" – and she had to be supported out by her family. I couldn't see, in the dark, whether her arm bore the neatly tattooed numbers that the arms of some of my classmates' parents did – and that always affected me with a thrill of horror. Ten years older than me, this man had lived more directly through those feelings, lived with and *among* those feelings. The first chance he got he raced to study in Germany. I myself have twice chosen not to visit Germany – but I understand his impulse to identify with the Other as a way of getting out of the neighborhood.

At the dinner, the memory about the movie pops into my mind but I

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pick up instead on the Bensonhurst – I'm also from there, but Italian-American. Like a flash, he asks something I haven't been asked in years: Where did I go to high school and (a more common question) What was my maiden name? I went to Lafayette High School, I say, and my name was De Marco. Everything changes: his facial expression, his posture, his accent, his voice. "Soo Dee Maw-ko," he says, "Dun anything wrong at school today – got enny pink slips? Wanna meet me later at the parrk or maybe bye the Baye?" When I laugh, recognizing the stereotype that Italians get pink slips for misconduct at school and the notorious chemistry between Italian women and Jewish men, he says, back in his Princetonian voice: "My God, for a minute I felt like I was turning into a werewolf."

It's odd that although I can remember almost nothing else about this man – his face, his body type, even his name – I remember this lapse into his "real self" with enormous vividness. I am especially struck by how easily he was able to slip into the old, generic Brooklyn accent. I myself have no memory of ever speaking in that accent, though I also have no memory of trying not to speak it, except for teaching myself, carefully, to say "oil" rather than "earl."

But the surprises aren't over. The female French professor, whom I have known for at least five years, reveals for the first time that she is also from the neighborhood, though she lived across the other side of Kings Highway, went to a different, more elite high school, and was Irish-American. Three of six professors, sitting at an eclectic vegetarian restaurant in Durham, all from Bensonhurst – a neighborhood where (I swear) you couldn't get *The New York Times* at any of the local stores.

Scene Two: I still live in Bensonhurst. I'm waiting for my parents to return from a conference at my school, where they've been summoned to discuss my transition from elementary to junior high school. I am already a full year younger than any of my classmates, having skipped a grade, a not uncommon occurrence for "gifted" youngsters. Now the school is worried about putting me in an accelerated track through junior high, since that would make me two years younger. A compromise was reached: I would be put in a special program for gifted children, but one that took three, not two years. It sounds okay.

Three years later, another wait. My parents have gone to school this time to make another decision. Lafayette High School has three tracks: academic, for potentially college-bound kids; secretarial, mostly for Italian-American girls or girls with low aptitude scores (the high school is segregated *de facto* so none of the tracks is as yet racially coded, though they are coded by ethnic group and gender), and vocational, mostly for boys with the same attributes, ethnic or intellectual. Although my scores are superb, the guidance

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counselor has recommended the secretarial track; when I protested, the conference with my parents was arranged. My mother's preference is clear: the secretarial track – college is for boys; I will need to make a "good living" until I marry and have children. My father also prefers the secretarial track, but he wavers, half proud of my aberrantly high scores, half worried. I press the attack, saying that if I were Jewish I would have been placed, without question, in the academic track. I tell him I have sneaked a peek at my files and know that my I. Q. is genius level. I am allowed to insist on the change into the academic track.

What I did, and I was ashamed of it even then, was to play upon my father's competitive feelings with Jews: his daughter could and should be as good as theirs. In the bank where he was a messenger and the insurance company where he worked in the mail room, my father worked with Jews, who were almost always his immediate supervisors. Several times, my father was offered the supervisory job but turned it down, after long conversations with my mother about the dangers of making a change, the difficulty of giving orders to friends. After her work in a local garment shop, after cooking dinner and washing the floor each night, my mother often did piece work making bows; sometimes I would help her for fun, but it *wasn't* fun, and I was free to stop while she continued for long, tedious hours to increase the family income. Once a week, her part-time boss, Dave, would come by to pick up the boxes of bows. Short, round, with his shirt-tails sloppily tucked into his pants and a cigar almost always dangling from his lips, Dave was a stereotyped Jew but also, my parents always said, a nice guy, a decent man.

Years later, similar choices come up, and I show the same assertiveness I showed with my father, the same ability to deal for survival, but tinged with Bensonhurst caution. Where will I go to college? Not to Brooklyn College, the flagship of the city system – I know that, but don't press the invitations I have received to apply to prestigious schools outside of New York. The choice comes down to two: Barnard, which gives me a full scholarship, minus five hundred dollars a year that all scholarship students are expected to contribute from summer earnings, or New York University, which offers me one thousand dollars above tuition as a bribe. I waver. My parents stand firm: they are already losing money by letting me go to college; I owe it to the family to contribute the extra thousand dollars plus my summer earnings. Besides, my mother adds, harping on a favorite theme, there are no boys at Barnard; at N. Y. U. I'm more likely to meet someone to marry. I go to N. Y. U. and do marry in my senior year, but he is someone I didn't meet at college. I was secretly relieved, I now think (though at the time I thought I was just placating my parents' conventionality), to be out of the marriage

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sweepstakes.

The first boy who ever asked me for a date was Robert Lubitz, in eighth grade: tall and skinny to my average height and teenage chubbiness. I turned him down, thinking we would make a ridiculous couple. Day after day, I cast my eyes at stylish Juliano, the class cut-up; day after day, I captivated Robert Lubitz. Occasionally, one of my brother's Italian-American friends would ask me out, and I would go, often to R. O. T. C. dances. My specialty was making political remarks so shocking that the guys rarely asked me again. After awhile, I recognized destiny: the Jewish man was a passport out of Bensonhurst. I of course did marry a Jewish man, who gave me my freedom and, very important, helped remove me from the expectations of Bensonhurst. Though raised in a largely Jewish section of Brooklyn, he had gone to college in Ohio and knew how important it was (as he put it) "to get past the Brooklyn Bridge"; we met on neutral ground, in Central Park, at a performance of Shakespeare. The Jewish-Italian marriage is a common enough catastrophe in Bensonhurst for my parents to have accepted, even welcomed mine – though my parents continued to treat my husband as an outsider for the first twenty years ("Now Marianna. Here's what's going on with you' brother. But don't tell a' you' husband.")

Along the way, I make other choices, more fully marked by Bensonhurst cautiousness. I am attracted to journalism or the arts as careers, but the prospects for income seem iffy. I choose instead to imagine myself as a teacher. Only the availability of NDEA Fellowships when I graduate, with their generous terms, propels me from high school teaching (a thought I never much relished) to college teaching (which seems like a brave new world). Within the college teaching profession, I choose off-beat specializations: the novel, interdisciplinary aproaches (not something clear and clubby, like Milton or the eighteenth century). Eventually I write the book I like best about primitive others as they figure within Western obsessions: my identification with "the Other," my sense of being "Other," surfaces at last. I avoid all mentoring structures for a long time but accept aid when it comes to me on the basis of what I perceive to be merit. I'm still, deep down, Italian-American Bensonhurst, though by this time I'm a lot of other things as well.

Scene Three: In the summer of 1988, a little more than a year before the shooting in Bensonhurst, my father woke up trembling and in what appeared to be a fit. Hospitalization revealed that he had a pocket of blood on his brain, a frequent consequence of falls for older people. About a year earlier, I had stayed home, using my children as an excuse, when my aunt, my father's much loved sister died, missing her funeral; only now does my mother tell me how much my father resented my taking his suggestion that I stay home. Now, confronted with what is described as brain surgery but

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turns out to be less dramatic than it sounds, I fly home immediately.

My brother drives three hours back and forth from New Jersey every day to chauffeur me and my mother to the hospital: he is being a fine Italian-American son. For the first time in years, we have long conversations alone. He is two years older than I am, a chemical engineer who has also left the neighborhood but has remained closer to its values, with a suburban, Republican inflection. He talks a lot about New York, saying that (except for neighborhoods like Bensonhurst) it's a "third world city now." It's the summer of the Tawana Brawley incident, when Brawley accused white men of abducting her and smearing racial slurs on her body with her own excrement. My brother is filled with dislike for Al Sharpton and Brawley's other vocal supporters in the black community – not because they're black, he says, but because they're troublemakers, stirring things up. The city is drenched in racial hatred that makes itself felt in the halls of the hospital: Italians and Jews in the beds and as doctors; blacks as nurses and orderlies.

This is the first time since I left New York in 1975 that I have visited Brooklyn without once getting into Manhattan. It's the first time I have spent several days alone with my mother, living in her apartment in Bensonhurst. My every move is scrutinized and commented on. I feel like I am going to go crazy.

Finally, it's clear that my father is going to be fine, and I can go home. She insists on accompanying me to the travel agent to get my ticket for home, even though I really want to be alone. The agency (a Mafia front?) has no one who knows how to ticket me for the exotic destination of North Carolina and no computer for doing so. The one person who can perform this feat by hand is out. I have to kill time for an hour and suggest to my mother that she go home, to be there for my brother when he arrives from Jersey. We stop in a Pork Store, where I buy a stash of cheeses, sausages, and other delicacies unavailable in Durham. My mother walks home with the shopping bags, and I'm on my own.

More than anything I want a kind of *sorbetto* or ice I remember from my childhood, a *cremolata*, almond-vanilla flavored with large chunks of nuts. I pop into the local bakery (at the unlikely hour of eleven a.m.) and ask for a *cremolata*, usually eaten after dinner. The woman – a younger version of my mother – refuses: they haven't made a fresh ice yet and what's left from the day before is too icy, no good. I explain that I'm about to get on a plane for North Carolina and want that ice, good or not. But she has her standards and holds her ground, even though North Carolina has about the same status in her mind as Timbuktoo and she knows I will be banished, perhaps forever, from the land of *cremolata*.

Then, while I'm taking a walk, enjoying my solitude, I have another

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idea. On the block behind my parents' house, there's a club for men, for men from a particular town or region in Italy: six or seven tables, some on the sidewalk beneath a garish red, green, and white sign; no women allowed or welcome unless they're with men; and no women at all during the day when the real business of the club – a game of cards for old men – is is progress. Still, I know that inside the club would be coffee and a *cremolata* ice. I'm thirty-eight, well-dressed, very respectable looking; I know what I want. I also know I'm not supposed to enter that club. I enter anyway, asking the teenage boy behind the counter firmly, in my most professional tones, for a *cremolata* ice. Dazzled, he complies immediately. The old men at the card table have been staring at this scene, unable to place me exactly, though my facial type is familiar. Finally, a few old men's hisses pierce the air. "Strega," I hear as I leave, "mala strega," "witch," or "brazen whore." I have been in Bensonhurst less than a week, but I have managed to reproduce, on my final day there for this visit, the conditions of my youth. Knowing the rules, I have broken them. I shake hands with my discreetly rebellious past, still an outsider walking through the neighborhood, marked and insulted – though unlikely to be shot.

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BOOKS

THE ART OF KUNDERA

THE ART OF THE NOVEL. By Milan Kundera.
Harper and Row. $17.95.

Kundera's remarkable little book of essays is at the opposite pole from the ponderous, jargonized theories dominating the academic critical journals that use art and literature as ideological fodder. Against conceptual agility and sociological ingenuity, Kundera's display of insight and literary imagination seems old-fashioned. Like most of the classic novelists and poets who also write critical essays – such as Eliot, James, Lawrence, Coleridge – Kundera writes about fiction as a practitioner of fiction, as one who writes his own novels with the history of the novel in his head. In the preface to *The Art of the Novel*, Kundera says, "Need I stress that I intend no theoretical statement at all, and that the entire book is simply a practitioner's confession? Every novelist's work contains an implicit vision of the history of the novel, an idea of what the novel is; I have tried to express here the idea of the novel that is inherent in my own novels."

The book contains discussions of Cervantes, Kafka, Broch, Musil, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Sterne, Flaubert, Balzac. There are luminous and provocative observations about life in Czechoslovakia, about totalitarianism, Stalinism, kitsch, the culture of Europe, modernism, realism in fiction, the rationalist tradition. Kundera has some very acute comments on Stalinism, particularly in Czechoslovakia, on totalitarianism in general, and on the reasons for the susceptibility of intellectuals to the virus from the East. He is discursive, ironic, playful, incisive, shocking, traditional, and original – at times seeming to be proceeding simultaneously in a number of different directions. But the sprawling commentary, darting in and out of its subject, is united by several themes. Kundera keeps coming back to the tradition of European culture, mostly as expressed in the history of the novel, to the meaning of modernism in fiction, and, though it is vaguer in its formulation, to the fact that modern man has lost his bearings.

The essays on Cervantes and Kafka are particularly suggestive, not only in their original treatment of the two writers, but also in exploring their

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Editor's Note: Both *The Art of the Novel* and this review were written before the changes, due largely to the effects of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, on the political scene today.

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relation to the history of the novel, which Kundera claims is part of the unfolding of the history of Europe. "The path of the novel," says Kundera, "emerges as a parallel history of the modern era." And Kundera further states that the germ of the modern novel is contained in its earliest expressions. Thus both Cervantes and Kafka, according to Kundera, were exploring the nature of existence, though the difference in time is revealed by the difference between Cervantes's adventurous concern with the ambiguities of a world that was opening and Kafka's anxious literary version of the ambiguities of a world that was closing. Joseph K is Don Quixote in modern dress: both are searching for their selves. But for Cervantes the self was wandering in "a world it could not recognize," while for Kafka the world was contained within himself. Kundera makes the further point that Kafka's prophetic genius created a world that later came in reality to resemble the psychological prison in which he lived. Kundera describes, with a sense of historical resignation, the Kafkaesque atmosphere of Czechoslovakia under Stalinist rule. Arguing that connections either in life or in fiction are not always causally related, Kundera makes the almost mythical observation that all the dogs were slaughtered in Czechoslovakia just before the invasion by Russian tanks in 1968.

"But why," asks Kundera, "was Kafka the first novelist to grasp these tendencies, which appeared on history's stage so clearly and brutally only after his death?" "Why didn't all the avant-gardists – who, claiming to know the direction of history, indulged in conjuring up the face of the future – foresee the turn of events?" It is because, says Kundera, Kafka saw the essence of the world in bureaucracy, in the abstract dimensions of the office, in the rule of the functionary. It is the "bureaucratic universe." These insights – or obsessions – says Kundera, enabled Kafka to create a poetic world that resembles totalitarian realities. The basis of totalitarianism, observes Kundera, is the obliteration of the distinction between the public and the private. And this merging of the two spheres, according to Kundera, is at the heart of Kafka's fiction.

Although Kundera insists he is not a political man – and to some extent this is borne out by his novels which have political overtones, but essentially exhibit the quality of an "existential" and erotic game – he does make some very astute political comments. For example, in explaining the sway of left ideology, Kundera says:

> . . . it is the system of confusions, the system of symbolic thought, that underlies all behavior, individual as well as collective. . . .
>
> The irrational system rules politics no less: along with the last world war Communist Russia won the war of symbols: it succeeded for

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> at least a half-century in providing the symbols of Good and Evil to the great army of [people] who are as avid for values as they are incapable of discriminating among them. That is why the gulag will never supplant Nazism as a symbol of absolute evil in the European consciousness. That is why people hold massive demonstrations against the war in Vietnam and not against the war in Afghanistan. Vietnam, colonialism, racism, imperialism, fascism, Nazism – all these worlds correspond like the colors and sounds in Baudelaire's poem, while the Afghanistan war is, so to speak, *symbolically mute*, or at any rate beyond the magic circle of absolute Evil, the geyser of symbols.

As Kundera leaps in and out of his subject, he makes a number of striking remarks. For example, he says of Dostoevsky that he grasped the madness of reason, and of Tolstoy that he uncovered the intrusions of logic. Flaubert, he says, discovered stupidity. He characterizes the realm of Kafka as the absolute of the serious and that of Schweik the absolute of the unserious. The novelist, says Kundera at another point, is neither historian nor prophet: he is an explorer of existence. But behind these seemingly disconnected observations are Kundera's two large themes: the centrality of Europe and the tradition of literary modernism, two ideas that are connected and at the same time constitute the large paradoxes in Kundera's thinking. It is surely a paradox, and one leading to some of Kundera's inventiveness and unpredictability, that this exile from a Russian satellite, reared on the provincialism of Stalinism, should have become a spokesman for the culture of Europe – which he rightly distinguishes from the territory. In this respect, Kundera is a traditionalist and a modernist, in flagrant opposition to those fashionable attitudes today that would discard the past. Thus he is quite dismissive of the cult of verisimilitude in fiction. And in upholding the true values of modernism, Kundera strikes out against what he calls "establishment modernism," which he describes as the "modernism of fixed rules, the modernism of the university. . . ." In an age of specialization, "establishment modernism," says Kundera, "has proscribed the notion of totality . . . According to establishment modernism, an impregnable boundary separates the 'modern' novel from the 'traditional' novel."

Another paradox – or contradiction – that strikes one is that the modernism of Kundera's "novelistic essays," as he calls them, raise fewer questions than his essayistic novels. Though his novels are masterful in their originality and complexity, they sometimes do not maintain a balance between pure narrative and intellectual stylization. Perhaps too much should not be made of this apparent disjunction, for much contemporary fiction is either too preoccupied with the story or too negligent of it. That Kundera is aware

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of the problem, however, would seem to be indicated by his very clever remark that "great novels are always a little more intelligent than their authors. Novelists who are more intelligent than their books should go into another line of work." At the same time, to counter those who lean toward the linear novel of quotidian life, Kundera says emphatically, "A novel examines not reality but existence."

Perhaps Kundera has swung somewhat in his novels to one pole of the fictional equation. This would seem to be indicated by his scorn of the debasement of modernism by kitsch. Citing Hermann Broch's definition of kitsch, Kundera says that:

> . . . kitsch is something more than simply a work in poor taste. There is a kitsch attitude. Kitsch behavior. The kitsch-man's need for kitsch: it is the need to gaze into the mirror of the beautifying lie and to be moved to tears of gratification at one's own reflection. . . . the opposite of serious art is light, minor art . . . I never minded Agatha Christie's detective novels. Whereas Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, Horowitz at the piano, the big Hollywood films like *Kramer versus Kramer*, *Doctor Zhivago* – those I detest, deeply, sincerely. And I am more and more irritated by the kitsch spirit in certain works whose form pretends to be modernism.

As a postscript to Kundera's summary judgement of kitsch, one might add that kitsch has spread lately to politics and to academic thinking, where it is not so easily recognized as in its literary form.

So much for the accents of Kundera's novelistic thinking. But, taken as a whole, his envelopment in modernism reminds us of the gap we took for granted in the past between the waywardness of the literary mind and the demands for practicality of the political mind. Kundera himself insists that the novel pursues human possibilities, not truth. Hence it cannot go beyond the probing of ambiguities. Indeed, he says further, in keeping with some of the latest thinking, there are no final truths in existence itself.

This view – or is it a sensibility – which nurtures eccentricity and does not yield to the demands of political responsibility is bound to clash with the rational and pragmatic concerns of politics. In recent times, however, so insistent have been the demands of politics in a world ruled by confusion, ideology, and rapid change, that politics and literature have tended to be homogenized. The approach to politics has been estheticized, and as Tsvetan Todorov noted in a striking piece on Heidegger and de Man in *The Times Literary Supplement*, the movement to deconstruct values and truths has led to an emphasis on originality and interesting ideas in political thinking. As a

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result, the merger of the literary and the political imagination has worked both ways: not only have political intellectuals, particularly on the left, become more entrenched in a moral and ideological pluralism, based on the experience of art, but the approach to literature has often been politicized, flattened out, given a social responsibility it cannot sustain. In this setting, the austerities of modernism are made to seem anachronistic, while both literary and political thinking give the appearance of being more in step with the world today.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

BRODKEY ON LOVE

STORIES IN AN ALMOST CLASSICAL MODE. By Harold Brodkey. Alfred A. Knopf. $24.45.

For several decades the New York literary cognoscenti have recognized Harold Brodkey, born in 1930, as one of America's most serious narrative writers since Norman Mailer burst on the scene in the late 1940s with *The Naked and the Dead*. In *New York Magazine*'s cover story on Brodkey – "The Genius" – Yale's high priest of the humanities, Harold Bloom, was quoted as calling him "an American Proust . . . unparalleled in American prose fiction since the death of William Faulkner"; Denis Donoghue announced: "There is no one writing in American literature at all comparable." Susan Sontag says: "Brodkey is going for the big stakes – I read every word he writes." Brodkey clearly is the favorite writer of the high-powered intellectuals, but until this past year his literary reputation has remained somewhat *sotto voce*; although his novella-length short stories have appeared in *The New Yorker*, Brodkey has chosen to avoid publication of his long Proustian opus, *Party of Animals*. His wife, the writer Ellen Schwamm, has frequently had to remove completed portions of the narrative from Brodkey.

Several years before that novel is due to appear, Knopf published Brodkey's *Stories in an Almost Classical Mode*; the resonance from the book's appearance was unprecedented for a volume of short stories. The literary world seemed to wake from its deep commercial slumber of the past decade – though Brodkey's only previously published book was *First Love*

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and Other Sorrows. Even those who are discomforted by his intense narrative recognized that serious attention must be paid.

Vanity Fair grumbled that "Innocence" – which *Time* Magazine called "the longest description of oral sex in the history of literature" – was too similar to Norman Mailer's famous story about an orgasm, "The Time of Her Time"; but *The New Republic* disagreed: ". . . this male protagonist is free of the bullfighter's impulse to subdue the female object that characterizes Mailer's hero; and the story is more than a *tour de force* of verbal evocation of the erotic, because it evinces such a subtle understanding of all that is at stake morally and psychologically between the two lovers in everything that happens, or does not happen, in the act of coition."

Harold Brodkey has returned literature to its rightful provenance; with him, it has always been a matter of life and death. *His* life, *his* death. In "Innocence," a Harvard student from the mid-West on scholarship – "I had no money. I was without lineage . . . " – yearns for four years to possess the most magically beautiful girl on campus: "To see her in the sunlight was to see Marxism die." Finally, in the spring of their last undergraduate year, he convinces her to visit him in his room. When she opens the door, he says, "I'm naked, Orra, under this sheet. I've been waiting for you."

Brodkey, in his novella-like stories, which are really a part of his long autobiographical narrative, is always there, naked under the sheet, abruptly stripping himself, seductively grabbing his audience in there with him, into that close, lyrical space, from which he examines the Brodkey encyclopedia of love, forcing his evocation of family into the American consciousness with the successful obsessive energy of an orphan.

Harold Brodkey was born Aron Weinbraub; his mother died when he was a year-and-a-half old. His parents were Russian Jews who had settled in the mid-West. His father was a drunk and an illiterate; he beat his son, briefly put him in an orphanage, then sold him to well-off relatives – secular Jews – for two hundred dollars. Just as an asthmatic can recognize in Proust's breath-holding sentences, and in his taking notice of every plant, every flower, the tracking down of a precise path, the life-and-death obsessions of an asthmatic to whom taking the wrong road in the wrong foliage is perceived as a life-and-death matter, so is Brodkey's autobiographical tracking down of his adoptive family, also, *the* essential life-celebrating/life-withholding event.

Brodkey is not nostalgic, nor are his concerns ethnic – his Jews are somewhat askew, marginal people, like Joyce's Bloom and Faulkner's Southerners. His investigations of sex are free of nineteenth-century rigid scatology – his autobiographical hero/self leads a precarious but not inhibited life; for Brodkey the crucial event is language. Two stories in this collection are

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clear masterpieces – in "Largely an Oral History of My Mother," Brodkey tries to recall the painful blank space in his ear, which is the Yiddish spoken by his real mother, in "A Story in an Almost Classical Mode." Conversely, he envelops his readers inside the extraordinary American monologue of his adoptive mother, a sort of lucky, plucky, shrewd, hysterical Molly Bloom adrift in Saint Louis during World War Two. The 1940s, with its disreputable, puckish atmosphere of an abundance of slightly black-market *things* – cars, gasoline, nylon stockings – laced with moral optimism, was a sexy time for adolescents. Brodkey gets into our nostrils the smell of his mother's purpley lipstick, the sportive look of the family car; spatially, we are inside the family, their rustling new clothes, their fragrances. Brodkey is an innovator in his amazing ability to change, close down, and alter distances in his protagonists, and between them and his readers. The adoptive father loses his money and dies of a heart attack, leaving behind, locked into a claustrophobic love/hate struggle, his wife, dying of cancer, and their prodigy stepson, on his way to a Harvard scholarship and a third life.

I once remarked to Brodkey that it had occurred to me that the excessive preoccupation with communism of those in the previous generation was due to the fact that communism was probably the one thing they weren't afraid to examine; as a subject it was relatively tame – it was the other stuff they couldn't look at. Brodkey laughed, because "the other stuff" is his domain – insanity, homosexuality, erotic love, death, money, and angels flying over Harvard Square. (Angels are more popular in European fiction than American.) In "Play," two boys – "Meanwhile I was a child. The children I knew hugged and seduced thousands" – play Tarzan. One of them, unaware of his own physicality, has an orgasm during their roiling about. In one of Brodkey's epiphanies, the workings of the boy's body are revealed to him, and, almost tangentially, the reader. At the end of the final story in the book, "Angel," Brodkey concludes with an apt description of his endeavor: "In the end, what was startling was that no one testified at the time. Or rather, it was all journalism and shock at first. And them came lyric attempts, and much cross-referencing back and forth. Only after many years were there convincing but frail and as if whispered attempts at honesty, of which this is one." In these sludgey times, Brodkey remains one of our few novelists writing as though the gods are still watching.

BARBARA PROBST SOLOMON

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TRILLING IN THE TRADITION

LIONEL TRILLING. By Stephen L. Tanner. Twayne Publishers. $19.95.
LIONEL TRILLING: THE WORK OF LIBERATION. By Daniel T. O'Hara. University of Wisconsin Press. $17.50.

Although at the time of his death in 1975 one did not doubt that Lionel Trilling would be memorialized in the loose canon of American writers represented by the Twayne United States Authors series, there was reason to suppose that "postmodern" cultural revisionism would soon post him as just another academic irrelevancy. Yet, while he has been condemned as a turncoat Thirties Marxist, who later employed a corrupt Freudianism to support a "sterile humanism," Trilling's pertinence to American intellectual history – or, to put this another way, to the history of American intellectualism – has remained alive in the last two decades of the century. The reason may not be too far to seek. More than his older and more famous contemporary, Edmund Wilson – more indeed than any American intellectual since Ralph Waldo Emerson – Trilling directly embodies, both in his life and his writings, the fundamental tension in American culture: the humanistic moral drama, the dramatic dialectic, of mind, self, and history. As in the case of the Emersonian representation of this drama, however, the Trilling representation involves us in the drama only to the degree our poetic or imaginative capacity continues to respond to it; and now, it has become apparent, this capacity may be lapsing.

The names of the most cogent exemplars of capable response, Emerson and Trilling, are at present invoked far less often than the names of Martin Heidegger, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and other European philosophers and literary theorists. Hardcore American defenders of the humanistic manner of thought and feeling charge that the European intellectuals have influenced American critics to undertake a systematic and remorseless deconstruction of what is deemed for various reasons to be an established conspiratorial interpretation of mind, self, and history in American culture. Meanwhile, it is ironically apparent that at the beginning of the last decade of this century – the first decade, some would have it, of a totally

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"postmodern" age – as much or more attention is being given to the tensions in American life and though expressed by the Concord Sage as is being given to their expression in Trilling. Indeed in the decade just ended, the decade marking the centennial of Emerson's death, in books like B. L. Packer's *Emerson's Fall: A New Interpretation of the Major Essays*, Joseph L. Kronick's *American Poetics of History: From Emerson to the Moderns* and Richard Poirer's *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections*, we have encountered a philosopher and literary and cultural theorist who is relevant not merely to the historical moment in which we live but is a participant in it. Meanwhile, the question of Trilling's relevance has been raised by Mark Krupnick in *Lionel Trilling: The Fate of Cultural Criticism*. The discussion continues in the studies by Stephen L. Tanner and Daniel T. O'Hara.

Any comparison of these studies must of course take into account the strict limitations imposed on Tanner by the format of the Twayne series. O'Hara, on the other hand, has had the freedom to write the longest, most detailed explication of Trilling yet published. Accommodating to the restricted space allowed him, Tanner has foregone a "systematic explication" of "subtle variations and detailed qualifications" in the individual writings, and, with the purpose in mind of illuminating Trilling's "distinctive achievement," has placed his emphasis on the development of his "central concepts." But a more significant limitation in Tanner's study is one the author has imposed himself: an adherence to Trilling's own debatable principle of literary inquiry, which held that "objectivity" originates in "a programmatic prejudice in favor of the work or the author being studied." He has also kept in mind, Tanner says, that Trilling was primarily a cultural, not a literary, critic, who, more concerned with the "quality of life" than "perceptions about literature," asked to be judged by this concern. In making judgment about Trilling, therefore, the reader errs if he follows the tendency to identify Trilling either with "ideological or practical politics." Interpreting him as a fallen political liberal has been particularly unfortunate. Trilling, Tanner says, was "distinctly apolitical," although he adds that in "his literary and cultural views" he was always "singularly conservative." Tanner does not say whether or not the same equation may be made in the case of a writer who, on the one hand, assumes an apolitical attitude and, on the other, a liberal cultural attitude.

Belying his somewhat oversimplified premise about the relationship of politics and literature in Trilling's thought and emotion, Tanner presents a concise evaluation of his writings from *Matthew Arnold* (1939) to *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972) that takes into careful account the complex ambivalence in Trilling's mature concept of the relationship of self to society. But the problem of oversimplification reappears in Tanner's concluding summary image of Trilling. Calling him "essentially a conservative – a conserv-

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ing mind – nurtured in a liberal-radical environment," or, in more categorical terms, "in an intellectual environment committed to modernism," Tanner holds that Trilling was a "traditional humanist," who, although "devoted to culture," assumed an "adversarial stance" toward its "coercive power." Trilling, Tanner says, was especially suspicious, as he himself said, of "the claims of literature to be an autonomous, self-justifying activity," believing that if literature is properly a criticism of life, "life is and ought to be a criticism of literature." Yet in spite of his regard for the primacy of the historical, existential experience of living, Trilling did not in Tanner's estimation recognize the importance of such a vital element of this experience in modern times as "the continuing secularization of culture and the gradual withdrawal of God." Even though he often mentioned the religious element in culture, he was "completely secular and incapable of deep or sympathetic response to the religious experience." At the same time, Trilling, yearned for "absolutes" in moral standards, turned toward hero worship, offering "idiosyncratic" interpretations of such chosen models of the heroic as Keats and Freud. At this point in his discussion, without comment, Tanner adapts a Nietzschean label to Trilling's case: Trilling was "one of the spirits of yesterday – and the day after tomorrow." But strangely Tanner passes over the question of in what sense Trilling may be considered as at once a spirit of the past and a spirit for a future beyond tomorrow, to conclude that while adapting "as best he could to his age . . . [he] looked fondly back at the nineteenth century, and maintained an unexpressed, or at least only rarely expressed, hope that the future would bring a revival of the humanistic values he cherished." Striking a simple elegiac note at the end of his book, Tanner leaves us with the feeling that, although he has touched on some of the deep complexities of Trilling's struggle to comprehend his age, he has basically depicted the career of a nostalgic survivor of a lost cause, one who may, depending upon how much we share with him the ethos of humanism, engage our sympathies but cannot truly engage our minds.

How differently Daniel O'Hara conceives of our relationship to Trilling may be pointedly illustrated by his appeal to the same Nietzschean reference about the spirits of yesterday and tomorrow. This occurs in O'Hara's study when he has under consideration Trilling's discovery in his essay on Nathaniel Hawthorne (*Beyond Culture*, 1965) that the "adversarial culture" of literary modernism has become institutionalized:

> The deterioration of high modernism into cultural fashion and a new orthodoxy so appalls Trilling that . . . [he] is driven to agree precipitously with Henry James's mistaken estimate of his famous precursor as a genial allegorist of the spirit who contrasts, in Trilling's distorted

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> view, most favorably with that modern celebrant of the tyrant dream of society and the absurdly autonomous imagination, Franz Kafka. In what is clearly a self-criticism as well as a criticism of "our time," Trilling impotently concludes, "Our judgment of Hawthorne may have to be that he is not for us today, and perhaps not even tomorrow." He is, in Nietzsche's phrase, Trilling pointedly adds, "one of the spirits of yesterday – and the day after tomorrow." In the final analysis Trilling is asserting that his subversive patriarch Nathaniel Hawthorne is so subversive that he cannot even be heard now. Instead, as Nietzsche contends about himself in *Ecce Homo*, this Hawthorne must be born posthumously, in the mind of some ideal reader of the utopian future, which the untimely critic of the present despairingly projects as his specular supplement. This ideal reader is the reflective offspring of the disintegrating mirror-stage of his latest critical essay in cultural despair.

Obviously we do not here meet Trilling the nostalgic humanist Tanner portrays, but a Trilling who, entering on the last decade of his life, misreads Hawthorne's character for the sake of inventing a figure of heroic displacement to mirror his own desperate sense of historical displacement. Placing the passage just quoted in the context of O'Hara's exhaustive, passionate, apocalyptic appraisal of Trilling, we can hardly fail to realize O'Hara's engagement with Trilling involves a quest for personal salvation. O'Hara is, to be sure, frank about this. Having prepared an essay in which he "blasted" Trilling for his "revisions" of Freud in *The Liberal Imagination*, *Beyond Culture*, and *Sincerity and Authenticity*, O'Hara turned later, he says (as he apparently had not done before), to the crucial collection of essays, *The Opposing Self*, and to Trilling's fiction. "Surprisingly" he "felt restored to imaginative health and energy," having discovered, as he had not earlier, Trilling's "generally magnanimous style of mind in dealing with his experiences, his own abilities and limitations, [and] those of his intellectual opponents." Deciding that "I owed him one," O'Hara decided to make amends by transforming the essay on Freud into a book on Trilling.

A contribution to the Wisconsin Project on American Writers, edited by Frank Lentricchia – one of the endless revisionary projects now going on in the area of American literary studies, shortly to attain at least an initial synthesis in the new *Cambridge History of American Literature* – O'Hara's payment of his debt to Trilling takes the form of an "experiment in reading," the intention of which is to read all of Trilling's writings as one work, and in doing so "to create" the exemplary image of a mind that, when confronted by the achievement of another mind, was capable not of "resentful critique alone"

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but (unlike the revisionary mind as represented by neo-Marxists, feminists, deconstructionists, *et al.*) of "imaginative sympathy." The "master figure" O'Hara draws on in "creating" Trilling as an exemplary self is the one that he finds Trilling himself implicitly adopted as his emblem, that of the Wandering Jew, who in Trilling's "ironic revision" of the stereotype, O'Hara says, becomes the "subversive patriarch" of literary ethics. Accommodated to Trilling's own purposes – which were "ever to dissent from the orthodoxies of dissent" – the Wandering Jew represents Trilling's "defensive formation" of a "public persona" derived from the "repressed or unconscious religious allegory of reading to be discovered in the classic Freudian conception of ego development." In his "continuing responsiveness to the reality of loss and death," Trilling found that "the ego can preserve the imaginative power of love." Freud, O'Hara says, "was ever Trilling's hero of fate." The overall purpose of his experimental reading of Trilling, he declares (acknowledging the heavy influence of Harold Bloom) is "to try out an ethics of criticism based on aesthetic appreciation of style that would define the essential function of the writer in the modern world" as Trilling envisions this in such careers as those of E. M. Forster or, later, Isaac Babel – writers who "serve as the public figure, however marginal or well connected, for the personal life." The need for the assertion, or reassertion, of the writer as a public model is that in the literary realm as we know it today "rapacity and resentment" have "run rampant." O'Hara hopes "the vision of the Other traditionally enshrined in literary study, and so rarely practiced now, may just prove to be subversively efficacious."

In elucidating Trilling's magnanimous vision of the patriarchal Other O'Hara places more emphasis than any student of Trilling to date on his "radical ambivalence" about being a Jew in America. Defying Trilling's own testimony that being a Jew was not a basic problem for him, O'Hara seeks to buttress his case for a career-long, pervasive influence of Jewishness on Trilling's quest for identity by "deploying" as a "theoretical category" Sandra Gilman's study of *Jewish Self-hatred*. At times the influence O'Hara ascribes to Trilling's Jewish heritage seems extreme, as in his conception of Trilling's relation to the image of the Wandering Jew. In a way, O'Hara points out, this mythical figure was embodied in Trilling's own father, who came to America from Poland after he "blew some lines at his own bar mitzvah" and lost his chance for the rabbinate. But O'Hara goes beyond the possibility that in the image of the Wandering Jew as he witnessed this in his father, Trilling found a symbol of his own alienation. He contends that Trilling "subtly" derived all of "modern culture from the spirit of his own displaced origins, via the profoundly repressed ghetto imagery which haunts the margins of all those 'dark and dubious places' [Trilling's phrase] of our secularized spiritual-

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ity." Such a pronouncement has the ring of the post-Holocaust temper and may well be modified by the observation of William Phillips (noted in Tanner) that in the historical context of Trilling's original effort in the 1920s and 1930s to come to grips with his Jewishness, "one thought less of one's ethnicity than of one's internationalism and concerns for humanity as a whole." It was a time, Phillips observes, when "we thought of literature and our literary profession not as Jews, but as heirs of the Western tradition."

But O'Hara's insistence not only on an early but also a constant and pervasive ethnic motive in Trilling's career is germane to an interpretation in which Trilling's Jewishness is the sign not of social ostracism but of an inner alienation, one that first develops with the young Trilling's self-conscious struggle to come to terms with his ethnic heritage, his unsuccessful repression of this struggle, and its continuance as an underlying tension in the sensibility of America's "last major man of letters." The result was that, isolated in a vocation to criticism that had become "ghettoized in America society and its universities," Trilling perceives in his final essays and in *Sincerity and Authenticity* that his career has become the apocalypse of American critical humanism. In *The Experience of Literature* (1967), O'Hara says, Trilling had still been the critic "encountering the force of style" in the canon of "the great dead" and performing "a kind of spiritual psychoanalysis" and a climactic "work of liberation" by "completing their passions in his . . . [own] understanding of them" and his identification with "their transcendent judgments" By the time he wrote *Sincerity and Authenticity*, he had become a witness to the vanquishment of the man of magnanimous mind by the mutant type of personality described in Hans Kohut's revision of Freud's concept of narcissism in *The Analysis of Self* (1971). Kohut sees society coming to be composed of persons who possess "an under- rather than an overdeveloped superego" because in childhood they did not experience a "patriarchal figure worthy of and capable of tolerating the child's idealization." "Motivated primarily by a sense of shame and not guilt," such persons were beyond reach of what Trilling as a "representative critical humanist" depended on "intellectually," namely, "Freud's secularization and internalization" of the Judeo-Christian moral scheme, in which "the psychic necessity of suffering" was the equivalent of Adam's curse due to the Fall." "Other-directed" persons of this kind defied Trilling's work of moral and spiritual liberation through adherence to "heroic example of the magnanimous mind."

Discussing Trilling's reaction in *Sincerity and Authenticity* to the mutant personality – in which Trilling bitterly attacks the neo-Freudians, particularly R. D. Laing for his argument on behalf of the "social determination and ideological definition of insanity" – O'Hara pauses unexpectedly to note, "It would be politically expedient for me, in terms of my immediate professional

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self-interest, to discuss Trilling's position here as merely the predictable outcome of the conventional family romance in which, in this case, Freud as the representative of the tragic law of life has replaced David Trilling as the failed rabbinical student and irresponsible father, so that the anxious son, whose identity is ever on the verge of disintegration, may assimilate his adopted precursor's disabling weakness entirely into his native culture in the form of a hell of mirrors to which it is completely condemned." This would mean that nobody would take Trilling's criticism of "this new personality type" seriously. "It could be seen as just his own psychopathology writ large in the most New York Intellectual of styles." But, O'Hara adds, Trilling's criticism of Laing and his disciples demonstrates an "impersonal power" that demands we take the argument seriously.

There is an ironic pathos – the pathos of an age O'Hara himself tags as one of "revisionary madness" – in the overt recognition on O'Hara's part of his own magnanimity in having chosen not to pillory Trilling as a psychopath, when in doing so he would have ingratiated himself with his revolutionary contemporaries. Yet although he shares with them a desire for a new order that must come through the deconstruction of the old order, he does not share with the present-day revolutionists the blind will to obliterate all the structures of the past. In the creation of an "empowering dialectic of imaginative development toward an exemplary achievement of nobility in personal style," O'Hara sees the resolution of the present "paralyzing impasse between the revolutionary principle and the conservative instinct." Cautious about what he deems to be the "severe limitations and self-deceptions" of the magnanimous mind as typified by Trilling – Trilling's calculated mispresentation of Freud, for instance, or in general his disposition to intellectual elitism – O'Hara nonetheless finds that Trilling still preeminently represents the "impersonal power" of the life of the mind, a power that "should not be lost sight of or mocked" in the struggle of his own generation "to carve out a career and make the world ready for revolution."

Implied in O'Hara's tortuous effort to come to terms with Trilling and the increasingly austere body of literary and cultural criticism he wrote in the years of the Cold War, the Vietnam conflict, and the rise of the counterculture movement, is, one may say, the whole history of the humane, secular mind. Always presuming itself to be rational in its motives, the humane or humanistic mind had found its chief agency in the autonomous, administrative self it had liberated in the revisionary process of secularizing what it ostensibly had rejected: the corporate, spiritual society of myth, icon, and tradition that had provided the model of mind in the Middle Ages. In the process of the secularization of the spiritual – which reversed the roles of society and mind and made the mind the model of society – there developed the com-

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plementary process of the spiritualization of the secular, out of which emerged the figure of the secular artist as priest. An image of autonomous personal authority, this figure paradoxically represents, as Trilling explains in *Sincerity and Authenticity*, the "doctrine of the impersonality of the artist." As set forth in a well-known dictum by T.S. Eliot, this doctrine holds, "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." Made in defiance of the fact that Eliot's own work, and all that of the "great modern masters," is "preoccupied with personal concerns, with the self and with the difficulties of being true to it," Eliot's brazen contradiction, Trilling says, failed not only to be questioned by the secular-spiritual elect of poets but also by the "criticism that grew up with the classic modern literature." The critic, while seeking to elevate the uniquely personal quality of each poet, yet insisted with the poet that he "is not a person at all, only a persona," and that "to impute to him a personal existence is a breach of literary decorum. Trilling does not pursue the plain implication, that the authors of the criticism that developed with modern literature came to see themselves as having a stake in the artist's claim to embody both personal and impersonal power. The critic too would acquire a priestly autonomy. It is not altogether surprising that the youthful Trilling, aspiring to be a novelist, took as his model the intense example of selfhood in art offered by Ernest Hemingway, a master of the "I" persona, and a writer for whom Trilling always expressed a poignant regard. ("Who would suppose," he asked in his notebook when Hemingway died in 1961, "how much he has haunted me?")

Even though O'Hara appreciates the importance of Trilling's attachment to the Nietzschean concept that the "ascetic ideal in religious or secular forms has been the only meaning that humankind had devised for itself on this earth," he would not seem to give the doctrine of impersonality its full due with respect to Trilling's sense of the character of the critic. Perhaps this sense becomes clear in *Sincerity and Authenticity* only when Trilling acknowleges that the time has come when criticism has ceased to insist on the decorum of the poet's or novelist's impersonality and has accepted the appearance of the writer in an authentic, "an unmediated exhibition of the self." In the light of this remark, we realize Trilling's criticism as a whole, but most notably from *The Opposing Self* (1955) onward, constitutes a kind of secular-spiritual autobiography, the record of a quest for a self image – for his selfhood as a critic – that reached a culmination in Sincerity and Authenticity yet never reached a resolution. Trilling never appeared to his audience save as a mediated self.

If, as Trilling says, the goal of the artist is to be as "self-defining" – as unmediated – as the art object he creates, cannot his last extended work be said to embody the goal of the critic as artist – to display " the authenticity of

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which the object itself is the model and the artist [the artist as critic] the personal example"? Having referred in *Sincerity and Authenticity* to Sartre's *La Nausée*, in which "the protagonist Roquentin, at the end of his dairy of queasy despair, permits himself to entertain a single hope . . . that he may write a story which will be 'beautiful and hard as steel and make people ashamed of their existence'," Trilling adds: "The authentic work of art instructs us in our inauthenticity and adjures us to overcome it." It is not farfetched to substitute "criticism" for "art" in this imperative declaration of the triumph of the doctrine of authenticity over the doctrine of impersonnality, a doctrine Trilling associates with a calculated "devaluation of sincerity" in the relationship of artist and society. Implied in the creation of a persona by the artist – this being a stage, so to speak, in the movement toward the authentic relation between the artist and society – is the idea that this relation can occur only when the artist opposes to society an uncompromising, integral selfhood. But Trilling, who had in his essay on Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* in *The Opposing Self* first perceived the terror of the self's seeking to transcend sincerity in an unmitigated desire for authenticity, offers his adjuration to authenticity in his comment on La Nausée through the ironic vision of a carefully mediated and, in the best sense of the term, humane, selfhood that resisted the apocalypse of authenticity in the name of civilization.

Summarizing the basic "motive and work" of Trilling, O'Hara dubs Trilling a "critic of critics," the opposer of the opposers, and "unmasker" of the "unmasked." In this role "he wrote himself into American literature as its subversive patriarch, whose texts were ironically structured as object lessons, parables for all pharisees and radicals." But we may not be content to believe that O'Hara's elaborate unmasking of Trilling, although it is a challenging and significant effort to effect a mediation between an unmasker from the mid-century generation and the unmaskers of the end-of-the-century generation, has in the image of the subversive patriarch revealed the face behind the face of Lionel Trilling. This face remains hidden in the complex and troubled body of his critical writings, comprising as they do the story of Trilling's long encounter with the mystery of mind, self, and history as this presented itself to an American intellectual in the twentieth century.

LEWIS P. SIMPSON

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TOCQUEVILLE'S HISTORY

TOCQUEVILLE: A BIOGRAPHY. By André Jardin. Translated from the French by Lydia Davis with Robert Hemenway. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $35.00.

This excellent biography could scarcely come at a more propitious time. This year marks the sesquicentennial of *Democracy in America*, following the bicentennial of the French Revolution, the event that above all others dominated Tocqueville's consciousness. Finally, the book caps a half-century of unbroken Tocqueville prosperity as a major intellectual force in modern history.

Tocqueville's has been a curious history. He rose overnight to fame when Part One of *Democracy* was published in 1835; not, as Jardin notes, without help from powerful friends such as Chateaubriand and Royer-Collard, but fame nonetheless. Tocqueville's reputation survived, possibly grew somewhat, with the printing of Part Two in 1840, but the reviews were more mixed, in some cases sharply critical of what one reviewer, Villemain (who had gone all out with enthusiasm for Part One), referred to as "an abuse of the philosophical method," withal a greater reliance upon intuition and extrapolation than upon concrete history and observation. Villemain and others objected also to the mood of foreboding and pessimism that highlighted so much of Part Two. Even so, Tocqueville's stature remained large for at least a decade after his death in 1859.

The fall of Tocqueville as an intellectual force seems to have commenced in the 1870s; and after Bryce's *American Commonwealth* appeared in 1888, to dominate its field for a full generation, the Tocqueville eclipse was complete. Occasionally a Dicey in England, an Arthur Hadley or Woodrow Wilson in this country, would lament the passing of Tocqueville as a significant influence. But during most of the 1930s Tocqueville's fall was still manifest on both sides of the Atlantic. In seven years of an undergraduate and graduate education at Berkeley in the 1930s, I did not once hear his name.

Before the 1930s ended, the second rise of Tocqueville was under way. George Pierson's epochal *Tocqueville and Beaumont in America* came off the press in 1938 to immediate applause. In England a year later, J. P.

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Mayer, the greatest of Tocqueville scholars, published a small but puissant volume on Tocqueville as the prophet of mass society. Albert Salomon, a refugee European scholar at the New School in New York, published two evocative pieces on Tocqueville in the decade. In 1945, Alfred A. Knopf, in heroic service, published the first edition of *Democracy in America* in half a century. By the middle of the 1950s the words "as Tocqueville said" were almost as common where intellectuals gathered as "as Marx said." By the early sixties, arguments became fierce as to whether Tocqueville was a conservative, a liberal, or even a radical, the sure sign of a political classic. There is presently no indication of any waning of Tocqueville; certainly none to interfere with what is certain to be a glorious sesquicentennial on both sides of the Atlantic, the American doubtless a little more glorious.

Jardin gives us an admirable fusing of Tocqueville the man, the celebrity, the thinker, and, of special value, the politician. For sixteen years following the publication of Democracy, Tocqueville published little of consequence. His life was filled with political office. "Even in . . . his early twenties, Alexis de Tocqueville could not conceive of fulfilling his personal destiny in any other way than by active participation in political life," writes Jardin. His fame as author of *Democracy in America* assuredly didn't hurt his reputation as a politician, but that reputation took on a momentum all its own. When the Revolution of 1848 – which Tocqueville eloquently forecast just before it broke and, I think, more convincingly than Marx did, and more subtly too – came, Tocqueville was elected to the Constitutional Commission. And after victory, he became France's Foreign Minister.

His public career came to an end in 1850, as much, Jardin suggests, from the onset of tuberculosis as disgust with Louis-Napoleon and the coup d'etat. He set to work writing his *Recollections* without delay. For those occasionally wearied by the Olympian seer writing *sub specie aeternitatis* in the *Democracies*, the *Recollections* is tonic. From the point of view of style it is Tocqueville's best book. Here is the real Tocqueville, warts and all, on the stage of history. For those who have ventured to find the Galbraithian liberal or the social democrat born of Rousseau in Tocqueville, the Recollections should be a quick cure. His favorite economist was not his friend Mill but Nassau Senior; he was contemptuous of contemporaries who believed that legislation could set aside the dictates of Providence with respect to the unemployed and impoverished; he excoriated socialism for "stirring up war between the classes"; he was appalled by the "democratic disease of envy" infecting more and more people; and he criticized Lamartine harshly for failing to rout the unemployed demonstrating outside government halls.

The *Recollections* are invaluable too for self-portraits of its author, some proud, some rueful, always candid. "I find it troublesome to discuss

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matters which interest me little, and painful to discuss those in which I am keenly interested." "There is no man for whom approval is more healthy than for myself, nor anyone who needs more than I do to be helped by public confidence and respect." "My dissatisfaction with myself, my weariness and reserve, were taken for presumptuousness, a fault which makes more enemies than the most glaring of vices." "All the party leaders whom I have met in my time have with few exceptions appeared to me equally unworthy of holding office." "Whenever I have . . . been obliged to speak in defense of a bad cause or to assist in bad measures, I have immediately found myself deprived of all talent and ardor." "In France there is only one thing we can't set up: that is a free government; and only one institution we can't destroy: that is centralization." "He [J. -J. Ampere] had a deadly fear of bores, but bigotry he detested from the bottom of his heart."

From the *Recollections* we do not acquire any due sense of the illnesses which plagued Tocqueville's life. Jardin lists pleurisy, neuralgia (often crippling), migraine, and finally tuberculosis in his last nine years among the ailments that interrupted his writing and then political career. To these we are permitted to add the doubt that assailed him in virtually every undertaking of his life. He had become a religious skeptic in adolescence, and his passion for politics, whether as participant or observer, only hardened this congenital doubt. He might have had himself in mind when he set down in the American notebooks the three 'miseries' that afflict mankind: Disease, death and doubt. He could never make up his mind about democracy, more specifically equality. He could attribute to equality (rather than enlightenment) the rising humanitarianism of modern European history; he could also attribute to equality the soul-destroying leveling and homogeneity that he believed threatened the world. At the end of Part Two of Democracy he in effect turns the matter over to the "Almighty and Eternal Being . . . What appears to me to be man's decline is, to His eye, advancement; what afflicts me is acceptable to Him." (Despite the deference to God here, Jardin shows conclusively, I think, that Tocqueville even on his deathbed refused to recant his lifelong skepticism.)

The nearest to a signal deficiency of Jardin's biography is the lack of sustained consideration of the milieu within which Tocqueville's writing and deeper thinking took place. Admittedly this is a failing of just about all the Tocqueville scholarship of the last fifty years. Those who have tried to make him heir of the Enlightenment have not proved their case. It was Edmund Burke, no principal of the Enlightenment or Revolution, to whom Tocqueville accorded the praise of "powerful mind," "practical wisdom," and "masterful." Jardin does offer some enticing hints of the possible influence on Tocqueville of Lamennais and others who in the 1820s brought liberal, social Catholicism

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into being.

Lamennais, who had been a charismatic figure in the Paris of the 1820s, began, with the backing of other liberal Catholics, the newspaper *L'Avenir* in the 1830s. The following aims emblazoned the masthead: decentralization of government, localism, freedom of association, separation of church and state, and independence of the judiciary. It is quite possible that Tocqueville had a prepared mind when he and Beaumont went to America in 1831 and was struck by the existence of these attributes of American society. And whatever else we may think, these were hardly ideals that resonated through the Enlightenment.

ROBERT NISBET

WITTGENSTEIN'S WORLDS

WITTGENSTEIN: A LIFE. VOLUME I. YOUNG LUDWIG, 1889-1921. By Brian McGuinness. University of California Press. $22.50.

Wittgenstein's career depended on Cambridge University and on Bertrand Russell. Reviewing it, one cannot fail to be impressed with the maternal genius of Russell, drawing Wittgenstein along the path that led to his life's work, and with the different succor provided by G. E. Moore or John Maynard Keynes when Russell's personality grated. How much of this story would there be to tell, I wonder, if English universities had been as "efficient" then as they are being made today?

Here is how McGuinness begins the story:

> The house of Wittgenstein with which we are concerned took its rise at the end of the eighteenth century in the village of Laasphe in the county of Wittgenstein not far from the castle of the princely family of that name. In some year unknown, or perhaps in no definite year, Moses Meier, son of Meyer Moses of Laasphe and the prince's factor, adopted the name of the county as his surname.

Hermann Christian Wittgenstein had modest success in Leipzig, and the family became established. His son Karl Wittgenstein had great success in Vienna, and the family became prominent. Young Ludwig was the last of Karl's eight children, all educated at home and imbued with the standards of achievement embodied in their remarkable parents. As a young teenager he was confronted with the suicide of two of his older brothers (one by

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drowning in the Chesapeake and one by poison in Berlin) and with trenchant and irrefutable mockery by Karl Kraus of the bloated self-image and festering bureaucracy of the aging Hapsburg Empire. How wonderfully different Cambridge was – a place to work, even if he could not be at home there.

This biography portrays the young man by placing him in a series of broad contexts: family, Austria, *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, Linz (where Wittgenstein was in the same school as Hitler for a year), capitalism and monarchy, Manchester and aeronautic engineering, World War One, Cambridge, Bloomsbury – and of course the problems of logic and philosophy. Just as Wittgenstein emerges through his relations and interactions with the people who constitute these various worlds, so too these different contexts emerge with clarity and character as McGuinness describes their impact on Wittgenstein. Perhaps the most surprising details concern World War One, in which Wittgenstein found a combination of physical danger, menial service, and religious mysticism that profoundly altered his way of life. Throughout the focus remains steadfastly on the man – the development of his aims and of his standards of success, what other people contributed to this development, and the agonies that arose through his sensitivity to the incompleteness of his achievements in both his public (philosophical) and private (moral and religious) life.

The simultaneous attention to both context and detail is superb and corresponds to a main thrust of Wittgenstein's philosophical lessons. Wittgenstein's breakthroughs in philosophy always came by paying attention to details. The main breakthroughs concerned the relation of language to our thinking. At the time of his early work, just after the astonishing revitalization of formal logic by Frege, Whitehead, and Russell, Wittgenstein was convinced that the answer would have to be found through discovering how logic is possible. So he looked very closely at the work of Frege and Russell on the foundation of logic, in search of the secret of the queer sentences of logic:

> *TLP* 5.511: How can logic – all-embracing logic, which mirrors the world – use such peculiar crotchets and contrivances? Only because they are all connected with one another in an infinitely fine network, the great mirror.

Having denied himself generalizations, Wittgenstein falls back on context (here a system or network). One can never *say* what significance the details have, but one can *show* it by presenting them in context.

Two lines of dissatisfaction have emerged in earlier reviews of this

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work. One, by Norman Malcolm in *Philosophical Investigations*, rejected McGuinness's exposition of the main lines of the *Tractatus*, to which the final chapter is devoted. The other, first voiced (with such vehemence as to question McGuinness's integrity) by George Steiner in *The London Review of Books*, is born of a prurient intellectual petulance that supposes revelations about sexual relationships to be indispensable for understanding character. Both of these complaints were seconded by William Gass in *The New Republic*. About the second of these complaints we need note only how aptly it illustrates why Wittgenstein assimilated theories to superstitions and myths: they constrain our seeing and our thinking, and make us miss alternatives that are there in life and in the world.

The first complaint is voiced more gently but rests on more substantial philosophical disagreements. Although McGuinness avoids exegetical details, he does have a perspective, one that is comprehensive, detailed, articulate, and controversial. This perspective emphasizes three unvarying and ever-present pillars of early Wittgensteinian wisdom: the inseparability of logic and ethics; the inevitability of mysticism (showing rather than saying) with respect to everything important, including logic and ethics; and the impossibility that philosophy (including these statements) should ever make rational sense. This point of view is anathema not only to those who assimilate Wittgenstein to Frege and Russell or to the Vienna Circle, but also to those (Norman Malcolm, David Pears) who view the later work as correcting an early metaphysical error. Yet I find McGuinness more convincing than the tradition which these critics represent.

The chapter on the *Tractatus* is not an exegesis. It begins with the history of its publication and is devoted mainly to a general account of its principal themes. Here McGuinness's controversial perspective is evident – and thoroughly justified. He begins, as no commentator has, by noting the "quasi-biblical" tone: "The work begins with a sort of creation myth . . . and ends with a mystical adjuration to silence in the face of the ineffable, as it were a form of negative theology. . . ." He thereby unabashedly stresses the "hidden content" to which Wittgenstein referred in his famous letter to Ficker: "My work consists in two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have not written." After commenting on the literary style this entails (including a suggestive parallel with Plato), he then explains the design of the work by focusing on the entries with whole numbers or only one or two decimals. This useful approach leads him to downplay both the famous "picture theory" of meaning and the so-called "logical atomism." The focus is instead on Proposition 4: "A thought is a proposition with a sense." The central question is how propositions are possible, and the details concern the prerequisites and consequences of this central question: "The work is a kind

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of systole and diastole around Proposition 4." The basic points are therefore in the 4.0's, which include the insight Wittgenstein himself identified as the crux: that "logical constants" do not refer. We get here some feeling for Wittgenstein's remark in his *Notebooks* that his work had broadened out from the foundations of mathematics to the essence of life (the world), and thereby some dim illumination of his insistence on the inseparability of logic and ethics.

McGuinness's brief orientation to these ideas is brilliant. If the ideas themselves seem as unsettling and unsatisfactory as they are ingenious, we should remember that they were substantially revised in Wittgenstein's later writings. McGuinness's achievement here makes one look forward to learning in the next volume how Wittgenstein's later career, in a very different world, was connected with these revisions.

NEWTON GARVER

JAMES SCHUYLER OF NEW YORK

SELECTED POEMS. By James Schuyler. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $25.00.

The poetry of the so-called New York School presents a reader with many attractions. It is open, ample, generous. It is disarmingly direct and charmingly casual. It speaks to us in the language of our everyday transactions, and its practitioners believe, as surely as Whitman and Williams believed before them, that the details matter in this life, and that no detail, be it public or private, urban or rural, "pretty" or "ugly," is out of place in a poem.

The leading poet pursuing the aesthetic of the New York School is probably James Schuyler. (John Ashbery is usually nominated for this honor, but it has become increasingly clear that he does not belong to the school at all. The New York poets are committed abo e all to translucency and a light touch, and Ashbery's work is plainly too burdened and hermetic to fit the category.) The appearance of Schuyler's Selected Poems is an especially welcome event, one that affords the opportunity not only to assess the work of one poet, but to put an entire literary movement into some sort of perspective.

"We Poets in our youth begin in gladness; / But thereof come in the end despondency and madness." Wordsworth could not have asked for a better example than the career of James Schuyler. In fact, one of the first things a reader notices in Schuyler's poetry is that the author has plenty of what blues singers call "trouble in mind":

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Wigging in, wigging out:
when I stop to think
the wires in my head
cross: kaboom. How
many trips
by ambulance (five,
count them five),
claustrated, pill addiction,
in and out of mental
hospitals,
the suicidalness . . .

What with schizophrenic episodes, the vicissitudes of penury, alcoholism and drug-addiction, and the hard luck of his homosexual love life, Schuyler certainly has every bit as much to confess as Lowell or Berryman or Sexton did. But there is a difference here, one of approach rather than of content. Confessional poets are actively seeking shock value, intent on borrowing the impact of appalling incident to give their poetry its power. Schuyler, though he is as frank about himself as any confessional poet, presents his unhappy case as merely one aspect of the wild profusion of this life. Why should be be unduly fascinated by our own extravagance, he asks, when the whole of existence is so beautifully extravagant and endlessly fascinating? This, he concludes a series of poems written from the asylum with some typically low-key lines that function as both a hymn of praise and a poetic credo:

. . . What is a
poem, anyway.
The daffodils, the heather
and the freesias all
speak to me, I speak
back, like St. Francis
and the wolf of Gubbio.

Deft and deceptively simple as this passage is, it illustrates only part of Schuyler's range. Confronted with the classic American quandary of whether to leave it all out or get it all in, New York poets, and Schuyler especially, have a hard time making the choice. Or rather, they are too open-minded to admit the necessity of such a choice, and so tend to oscillate from one extreme to the other. Reading Schuyler's work, one finds poems as narrow as one or two words per line which confine themselves to a single emotion or gesture or observation, and one finds other poems that swell to the margins and extend for fifty pages and consist of virtually everything that has oc-

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curred to the poet over the course of several months. Both sorts of poems are well-handled, but the longer ones deserve particular comment in that they are remarkably free of the long-liners' habitual Whitmania. Opting for a lack of intensity, Schuyler willingly runs a danger: that his refusal to get overly worked-up may be carried too far and leave his long poems feeling a bit slack. The goal he seeks in tuning his verse to such mild tones is the composition of genuinely comprehensive poetry that manages to avoid the bombast that has afflicted so many of our contenders in that field. Even as Schuyler has given us confessional verse without the melodrama, so he also gives us afflatus without the flatulence. Indeed, perhaps the major contribution of the New York School as a whole will turn out to be the control it has imposed on these two native impulses.

Another part of this poet's achievement, and an immensely attractive one, is that his insistence that nature and the mind are the best metaphors for one another. In "A Gray Thought" (the gray thought turns out to be a cloudy sky), he writes of lichen that grows with:

> a slowness becoming vast as though
> all the universe were an atom
> of a filterable virus in a
> head that turns an eye to smile
> or frown or stare into other
> eyes: and not of gods, but creatures
> whose size begins beyond the sense of size . . .

These lines make the connection between mind and universe explicit, an implied comparison whose recall is probably the most fruitful way to read the many loving descriptions of nature that abound in this volume, the poems as lush as the verdant landscape paintings the poet likes to use for the jackets of his books. "Un pictura poesis," as Horace's famous dictum goes, and rarely has his advice been taken so literally as it has been by the New York poets. Schuyler not only gives us painterly poems, he gives us poems about painting, poems dedicated to painters, poems about painters themselves. All this is not simply an accident of time and place, of the intimacy that existed between the New York art and literary worlds in the 1950s. Instead, it is the result of the poet's conviction that the world consists of its appearances, of tis surface. In a sense, Schuyler's poetry is deliberately shallow, precisely superficial: It is founded on a baroque premise, that if the world is its surface, then the surface is the poem. Appearances are what count in such poetry, and few poets are better at painting appearances than James Schuyler.

One must judge poets by their best work, of course, for writers are

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never without their weaknesses and occasional shortcomings. Among Schuyler's, the consciously courted slackness of tone has already been mentioned, and the touching sincerity of his work sometimes shades over into sentimentality and self-pity. But a case could be made that there is a more serious problem with Schuyler's verse, a problem he shares with the New York school in general: that his poetry is too often just too easy to understand. "A poem must resist the intelligence almost successfully," is the verdict of another word-painter, Wallace Stevens. Reflecting this requirement, the strongest poem in this book seems to me to be the sad and sobering "The Crystal Lithium," wherein the abundance of the world which the pot has celebrated elsewhere is seen as cruel and claustrophobic confusion. The central conceit is that a walk on the beach in winter gives one a taste of how the world looks to a man obliged to take lithium in order to maintain some sort of mental equilibrium:

> . . . the heat is on because the cold is all
> About as though, swimming under water, in clearly fishy
>
> water, you
> Inhaled and found one could live and also found you
>
> altogether
> Did not like it . . .

Nowhere in Schuyler's work are his difficult circumstances treated more matter-of-factly, and nowhere is his emotional distance from the world he loves and that torments him more clearly felt. The poem raises the possibility that if the best art is unemotional, still the attitude necessary to its composition might be the symptom of a sickness all its own, an ambiguity that makes for added complexity and pathos. "Thereof come in the end despondency and madness," and sad to say, one senses toward the close of Schuyler's *Selected Poems* that his fragility has tired him out. But the moving, disturbing and eloquent message of his work is that, if an artist is good enough, a certain despondency will have been part of the mix all along. Schuyler tells us that the true artist's madness is not a mania. Instead it is the detachment of long perspective, and as such it is not an endpoint or a by-product; it is a prerequisite.

GEORGE BRADLEY

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LETTERS

To the Editor:

I am completely astonished that you were moved to write about my Eliot piece (*PR* 2, 1990) – which I never expected to receive so much attention – and to write, moreover, with such extraordinary kindness.

Please know that I am in full agreement with you on every point. Part of the reason the piece is unsatisfactory – or may appear ambiguous – may lie in what it was I set out to do. My aim was mainly to describe the situation then (perhaps more autobiographically than historically) and now. I did not take on the task of overt defense of serious high culture (though it seemed to me that defense was implicit), nor did I propose to polemicize.

As I wrote to Hilton Kramer (who has now twice expressed, in print, a good deal of anger at my failure to polemicize), "The germ of this essay lay in a question that Robert Gottlieb, Editor of *The New Yorker*, put – not so much to me as to our generation. . . . Gottlieb wanted to know how [Eliot's] astonishing disappearance [from current literary discourse] had come about, and I undertook to find out. My 'reply' to the question is, I believe, not much more than an extended restatement of the question itself – the literary pickle we are in nowadays, including the accelerating disrespect for serious high culture. I described that pickle: I did not commend it."

I wish now that I had put into the essay what I finally see it was obligatory to say explicitly – those few sentences I wrote to R. W. Flint, and also to Hilton Kramer: "There is a difference, I think, between being swept away by the poetry and being swept away by the poet. In Eliot's case (and not only in Eliot's case), I willingly agree to the first but hope to avoid the second."

I added, "In 1948 [the year of the Nobel], and in the years of Eliot's ascendancy, this distinction was rarely sought." Perhaps this is critically mistaken – I was recollecting my own sense of things in college and graduate school, when Eliot, as public figure and poet, was, at least in the classroom, sacrosanct. For the sake of fresh seeing, I had determined to come to all that material *de novo,* and, except for the biographies, to concentrate on primary sources chiefly. Still, in looking over the mass of adulatory critical matter of the forties and fifties, I almost never came on a comment about Eliot's rotten side (which in those days would in any case never have concerned his unknown private life). By and large, according to the general intellectual atmosphere of that time (and anti-Semitism was a social given), it just wasn't "done." It struck me – I hope you'll correct me if I'm in error – that in those days there was extremely limited interest, confined to a few voices, in making the distinction between, as you say, "a writer's life and work," as well as extremely limited discussion of the problem itself. And it was that dis-

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tinction, above all, that I wanted to put on the record.

I agree also that the definition of the objective correlative as it appears in my piece turns out to be skimpy and askew; the "escape from personality" aspect is psychological, and isn't intended to be part of the definition. Unfortunately, my attempt at a rounder definition was curtailed as possibly too dense or academic for a general readership – and so the weakness you observe resulted.

But you are absolutely on the mark when you conclude that I do agree "with the defense of literary tradition and the emphasis on the distinction between a writer's life and work."

I thank you for that understanding; and also for your beautiful generosity.

Cynthia Ozick
New Rochelle, New York

To the Editor:

William Phillips, in his *Comment* on my book *The Liberal Conspiracy* (*PR1*, 1990), claims that I have made several "significant errors." I believe him to be wrong in every case.

1. Mr. Phillips writes that it is false to say that *Partisan Review* received funds from the Congress for Cultural Freedom. In referring to the magazine as having been "partially supported" by such funds, I relied on the fact that, to quote Daniel Bell: "For several years, *Partisan Review* received some financial support from the Congress for Cultural Freedom, in the form of subscriptions bought for individuals overseas who received the magazine free." (See his letter to John Leonard, Editor, *New York Times Book Review*, October 16, 1972, in archives of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, Chicago, Illinois.)

2. Mr. Phillips says I give "a false impression by not giving a full account" of his disagreement with the Chairman of a session on "mass culture" at the Congress's conference in Berlin in 1960. I cannot accept this charge. The issue is summarized on page 175 of *The Liberal Conspiracy*, and Mr. Phillips's memoir *A Partisan View* is also cited for those who want more details of his position.

3. I am also said to be in error in stating that Dwight Macdonald resigned from *Partisan Review* because he opposed the support which Mr. Phillips and Philip Rahv gave to the war against Hitler. Mr. Phillips says he resigned "because he wanted . . . to take over the magazine" or start a new one. But almost every commentator refers to the War as the decisive factor. Macdonald himself does in his letter of resignation. So does William Barrett in *The Truants*. So does Sidney Hook in *Out of Step*. And so on and on.

4. Mr. Phillips also says that "Coleman . . . invents a debate in the American Committee" about the virtues and vices of the mass society. But my account from which he quotes was not about the American Committee at all. It was about the international conference in Berlin 1960 referred to above.

5. One small final point. Mr. Phillips says that I erred in including Mary McCarthy among the debaters within the American Committee. Again, when mentioning her, I was not referring to

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the American Committee but to her role in Berlin in 1960. (She was a participant, as well, in the Congress's Milan conference of 1955 and a frequent contributor to Congress magazines such as *Preuves*, *Tempo Presente*, and *Encounter*.) But in fact she also joined in some of the American Committee's debates, for example, the public one called "In Defense of Free Culture" in March 1952.

Peter Coleman
Woollahra, Australia

William Phillips replies:

I am sorry to see Mr. Coleman repeating some of his errors and interpretations.

1. The Congress for Cultural Freedom informed us that it would like to send a couple of hundred subscriptions to *Partisan Review* and the other American literary magazines to various people in Europe and Asia. As I recall, they sent us a list of people whom they wished to receive the complimentary subscriptions, and this lasted for a year or two. It is surely disingenuous of Mr. Coleman to indicate that this constituted support by the Congress. Does he mean to imply that all the American literary magazines were thus "supported"?

2. I cannot follow the logic of Mr. Coleman's point. He says he did not give an account of the incident at the Berlin Conference because it is given in my book, *A Partisan View*.

3. On the question of Dwight Macdonald's resignation from *Partisan Review*, Mr. Coleman again presents a strange mode of reasoning. He cites other commentators to back up his erroneous statements. Surely, he might have consulted me, since I was the only one besides Dwight Macdonald and Philip Rahv who knew *all* the facts. Why didn't Mr. Coleman ask me about this before publication of his book?

4. Mr. Coleman cleverly avoids the substance of my questioning his characterization of Mary McCarthy, John Kenneth Galbraith, and myself as "new left" by saying the differences were exhibited at the Berlin Conference and not in the American Committee.

5. Mr. Coleman's complaint is a repetition essentially of the previous point.

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